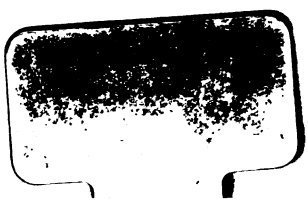

LIFE

OF

CONSTANTINE THE GREAT.

BY

JOSEPH FLETCHER.

"Constantine the Great was a very eminent man: he was not only a brave and great general, but altogether a great man, however much we may have to say against him."—NIEBUHR.

"Long before Constantine's time, the generality of Christians had lost much of the primitive sanctity and integrity, both of their doctrine and manners. Afterwards, when he had vastly enriched the church, they began to fall in love with honour and civil power, and then the christian religion went to wreck."—MILTON.

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PREFACE.

A SMALL work, like the present, needs little preface. The design of the writer is sufficiently indicated by the title-page and its two mottoes—one from the pen of Niebuhr, whose brief but masterly sketch of the reign of Constantine, in his Lectures on the History of Rome, makes us regret that he has not left behind more copious notices of the period; and the other from that of our own Milton, in whose writings there are so many allusions to the character and legislation of Constantine, all of them distinguished by his characteristic wisdom and genius.

Among the many references to the subject of this biography in the literature of our country, there is no separate work devoted to the record of his life. It seemed desirable, therefore, that one should be furnished; not too extended, yet sufficiently copious to put the public generally in possession of the main incidents of his career, and sufficiently authenticated by references to competent authorities to sustain the investigations of the more critical.

Besides consulting contemporary historians, the

Author has occasionally examined the statements of later ecclesiastical writers, and such modern works as relate to the general subject. He feels greatly indebted to Gibbon, whose account of the life and times of Constantine is so full, and, on the whole, so impartial, that, had the nature of his work admitted of a more biographical disposition of the several parts, little else would have been needed than to extract the portion which relates to him; and to Manso, whose compendious narrative and invaluable *appendices* have thrown so much light upon controverted facts and dates.

It only remains to state, that the Author has avoided citations from original authorities, in the foot-notes, as much as possible; and that he has been spared much labour in the passages quoted from Eusebius, by availing himself of the translations recently published by the Messrs. Bagster, to whose valuable series of the Greek Ecclesiastical Historians he would take this opportunity of directing the attention of the public.

CHRISTCHURCH,
January, 1852.

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CHAPTER I.

THE INTEREST ATTACHING TO THE DEEDS OF CONSTANTINE — HIS GENIUS, FORTUNES, GENERALSHIP AND TALENT FOR GOVERNMENT—HIS ADVANCEMENT TO SUPREME POWER IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE—HIS RELATION TO THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION—THE CONDITION OF ITS PROFESSORS BEFORE HIS TIME—THE CHANGE HE EFFECTED AND ITS INFLUENCE—THE TWOFOLD OBJECT OF THE PRESENT BIOGRAPHY.

ALTHOUGH more than fifteen centuries, crowded with stirring events and illustrious as well as infamous names, intervene between the age of Constantine and our own, the interest created by his peculiar deeds, instead of dying out from the minds of men, may, without exaggeration, be said to increase every day.

It is not difficult to account for this. His genius, acknowledged both by admirers and enemies, and of which Niebuhr has spoken so emphatically in the impartial estimate he has given of his character; his fortunes, so eventful, and, in many respects, especially in his early life, so romantic; his brilliant successes as a general, not unworthy of mention together with those of Alexander and Cæsar, Charlemagne and Napoleon; his rare talent for government, which won the notice of the more sagacious, and excited the jealousy of the world's rulers, while he was yet a young man; all these things, each of which is sufficient to cast lustre upon his name, combine to render the story of his life one of permanent attraction.

Constantine found the vast Roman empire nominally one, but really in many hands. Step by step, he ascended to the place of supreme power, and became sole ruler, with

a dominion which included all Europe and a large portion of Asia and Africa, extending from Britain on the west to Persia on the east. The circumstances through which this came to pass are not without interest even at this remote period of time. But none of these things, nor all together, have equal interest with the one item of his policy in reference to the Christian religion and its professors. It is this chiefly that perpetuates his memory, or rather that serves to revive it with each successive generation, as the nature and history of that religion come under fresh survey; the one feature sufficiently prominent to arrest attention, were all the rest of little moment, or even unworthy of notice.

The predecessors of Constantine, with few exceptions, had regarded christianity with a hostility as fierce as it was singular. It was a proscribed religion. Its professors were treated as atheists. Its fellowship was branded as ignominious. To patronize, to subsidize, it, had never entered into their thoughts. To exterminate it, if that could be accomplished, was their sole aim. All other religions, however gross, were tolerated. All the varieties of pagan superstition received the formal sanction of Rome.* But the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were persecuted to the death, as the most pertinacious of heretics, and their faith was condemned as a most perverse and extravagant superstition.† In fines, imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom, many thousands of confessors suffered at the hands of their fellow men, under the operation of unjust laws and edicts. The storms of persecution followed one another in rapid succession, and only at brief intervals was there any intermission.

The religion of Jesus survived these severities. It even made rapid progress. The many sublime examples of

* Neander and Gieseler discredit Tertullian's statement, that Tiberius proposed a bill to the senate, "that Christ should be received amongst the Roman gods."

† Pliny speaks of christianity as a *superstitio prava et immodica*, and of the firmness of Christians as *pertinacem certe et inflexibilem obstinationem*; Epist. lib. x. ep. 96.

heroic fortitude in circumstances of sanguinary opposition, combined with the comparative purity and benevolence of the christian character, operated powerfully in favour of the truth; and numbers were won over to the faith, by the conviction that a religion which offered no secular advantages, and yet sustained its adherents under the most appalling trials, must needs be divine.

When Constantine, therefore, came to the throne of the Cæsars, christianity may be said to have established itself, although not unmodified since its first promulgation, as a moral power which could not be destroyed. In what light he regarded it, the overtures he made to its clergy and professors, the edicts he sent forth in its favour, the wealth he devoted to its advancement, the interference he practised in relation to its formal development, and the results attending these things, traceable throughout the whole course of its subsequent history down to the present day, are points of primary importance to all who would form a correct opinion on one of the most momentous of all questions.

Indeed, the name of Constantine marks an era in the history of christianity and the church. His age was emphatically an age of transition; the necessary result of the new relations between christianity and the state, originated by himself. A greater change cannot be imagined than that which took place under his auspices. The outcast and the outlaw were introduced to the tables of princes, arrayed in purple and fine linen, and invested with titles of distinction and honour. Doctrines, that a little while ago were spoken of with scorn as fanatical, were now made the theme of discussion and the matter of legislation in the gravest courts of the empire. Ecclesiastical arrangements that for two centuries had been conducted, more or less, in secret, through fear of the secular power, were now submitted to imperial revision and sanction, and rendered binding with all the force of law. Property that had been filched away from its possessors on account of an obnoxious religion, was now restored tenfold, and augmented by donations from the treasury of the empire. And a profession that was formerly the badge of ignominy, the butt of

irony, and the passport to martyrdom, became the most honourable and enviable of all professions. In a sense not very remote from that in which the expression was originally employed, the offence of the cross had ceased.

Whether a transition so remarkable is to be regarded as one of natural and necessary development—necessary, that is, either then or at some subsequent period; or whether it is to be regarded as the formal commencement of a predicted anti-christian phase of the church, depends on other considerations than those which history furnishes. The present biography, without entering upon the discussion of those considerations, has mainly for its object such a detail of the whole truth in relation to Constantine's dealings with the church, as will materially assist all candid inquirers in coming to a just conclusion.

While, therefore, a complete account of the life of Constantine will be presented to the reader, or as complete an one as the materials that have descended to our time afford, the chief space will be allotted to that period and those acts which lend it so much interest, after so many centuries have passed away.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH OF CONSTANTINE—DISPUTES RESPECTING THE PLACE OF HIS BIRTH AND THE RANK OF HIS MOTHER — BOTH POINTS NOW SETTLED—OBSCURITY OF THIS PERIOD OF HIS HISTORY—LITTLE KNOWN OF HIS MOTHER, HELENA—THE FAMILY AND CHARACTER OF HIS FATHER, CONSTANTIUS — EARLY EDUCATION OF CONSTANTINE—EVENTS DURING HIS INFANCY AND BOYHOOD—HIS FATHER BECOMES GOVERNOR OF DALMATIA — DIOCLETIAN BECOMES EMPEROR—THE INFLUENCE OF THIS EVENT ON CONSTANTINE'S FORTUNES—THE NEW SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED BY DIOCLETIAN—THE FATHER OF CONSTANTINE BECOMES CÆSAR—THE REPUDIATION OF HELENA. A.D. 274—292.

CONSTANTINE the Great was born on the 28th of February, A.D. 274.* The place of his birth, and the country and rank of one at least of his parents, have furnished occasion for much learned discussion. British antiquarian and ecclesiastical writers, from William of Malmesbury, down to "honest old Fuller," concur in claiming for their own country the honour of his nativity, and dignify his mother with the title of a British princess. Not a few foreign writers, also, who cannot be supposed to have any national prejudices in favour of such an opinion, agree with them. But when they come to particulars, they differ so from one another, and make out so imperfect a story, that the number of testimonies serves rather to dissipate than to confirm the conclusion at which they have arrived. Whether the event took place at London, York, or Colchester, and

* Manso's Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 341, 374, where the reasons for this date are given.

what particular current of royal blood flowed in the infant veins, they cannot positively determine.*

It is now generally believed that Constantine was born at Naissus, a well-known town in Mœsia, at that time part of Dardania. The modern name of the place is Nissa, in Turkey, at the foot of a mountain-range separating Servia from Bulgaria. The situation of Naissus, about equally distant from the Euxine, the Ægean, and the Adriatic, and looking towards the territories occupied by the warlike Goths and Sarmatians, whose incursions into the civilized world were frequently made in that direction, rendered it a post of some importance. Only a few years before the birth of Constantine a great battle had been fought in its neighbourhood, between the army of Claudius Gothicus and the barbarians, in which fifty thousand of the latter were slain, and four times the number routed or taken captive.

It is also agreed amongst scholars, that the mother of Constantine, whose name was Helena, was of lowly origin, and a native of Rousillon, on the frontier between France and Spain. Ambrose, who wrote a few years after Constantine's death, speaks of it as a well-known fact that she was an innkeeper; and most contemporary writers affirm that she became the lawful wife of Constantius.†

This is almost all that has been ascertained respecting these matters. It would have been interesting to have known more of the circumstances relating to the birth and maternal parentage of so celebrated a person; but the records of this period are so defective or contradictory that nothing certain can be deduced from them. The great events of the brief but brilliant career of Aurelian, who

* See Fuller's Church History, book i. cent. 4, sects. 15—19, for these authorities.

† See the evidence on this subject in Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chap. 24; and Manso's Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 289—291. Gibbon makes her to have been an innkeeper's daughter; but Ambrose speaks of her as *stabularia*, in *Concion.* iv. *pro variis actionibus*, p. 123. Paris, 1661. Niebuhr mentions Rousillon as her native place, (Lectures on the History of Rome, (Schmitz,) lect. 78.)

was at that time emperor of Rome, still remain in chronological disorder; it is not likely, therefore, that the fortunes of a compatively obscure, though noble, Dardanian family should be better known. At a later period, in consequence of the celebrity of her son, Helena acquired a name in history. Her conversion from paganism to christianity through her son's influence, her munificent acts of piety, the respect paid to her by Constantine during her life, the peaceful circumstances attending her death, at the advanced age of eighty, and the more than filial reverence with which he cherished her memory, have been fully related by Eusebius.* Neither does there appear any good reason to doubt, that Constantine owed much of the vigour and energy that characterised him, to the constitutional temperament and the careful nurture and training of his mother.

The father of Constantine was Constantius, of whom we shall have to speak frequently in the course of our biography—a remarkable and, in many respects, truly noble man, who rose from the ranks of the army to become one of the Augusti, or chief rulers of the empire. His father, Eutropius, was of a noble family in Dardania. His mother, Claudia, was the daughter of Crispus, brother of the celebrated emperor Claudius Gothicus, already referred to.

Little, however, is known of him at this period. According to some he was twenty-four years old, but according to others only eighteen, when Constantine was born.† It seems probable that he entered early on that course of military service in which he so much distinguished himself, trusting his son to the care of his wife, Helena, and to such preceptors as the neighbourhood of Naissus might afford.‡

* Life of Constantine, (Bagster,) book iii. chap. 43—47.

† Most authorities mention "about A.D. 250," as the time when Constantine was born; but Manso says, "It is not known in what year," although he unhesitatingly states that he was in his eighteenth year when Constantine was born. (Leben Constantins des Grossen, p. 10, compared with p. 336.)

‡ Procopius, the secretary of Belisarius, and prefect of Constantinople, under Justinian, A.D. 562, mentions Drepanum, a sea-port in Bithynia, as Constantine's nursing-place. (De Ædificiis Justiniani,

Nothing particular has reached us relating to the early years of Constantine. All accounts agree respecting his excellent natural endowments, both of body and of mind. His education does not appear to have been neglected; but, in accordance with the spirit and requirements of the age and the taste of his father, it must have partaken largely of a military character. Important events, however, occurred within this youthful period. Great victories were obtained during his infancy by Aurelian, whose brief reign is so fertile in remarkable exploits, and the tramp of war was not unfrequently heard around his cradle. Aurelian fell a victim to treachery in his second year. Before he was eleven years old the sceptre of empire passed successively through the hands of five monarchs—Tacitus, Probus, Carus, Carinus, and Numerianus. During the same period his father's fortunes became more and more prosperous. Through valour and moderation, he rose in the army from one post of distinction to another; and in the reign of Carus, after the famous victory over the Sarmatians, occupying the northern regions of Europe and Asia, now forming a large portion of Russia, who had invaded Illyricum and the countries round about Naissus itself, he was appointed governor of Dalmatia. Whether he removed his family from Naissus at this period to the new scene of duty has not been ascertained.

After the death of Numerianus, in the eleventh year of Constantine, A.D. 284, Diocletian was proclaimed emperor by the army of Asia. This event introduced a new era in the history of the empire,* and had an important bearing on the fortunes of Constantine himself; first, by leading to the promotion of his father to the rank of Cæsar; and secondly, by opening up facilities for Constantine's early

Eb. v.) This may have been the case, and yet Naissus may have been the home residence.

* "The year 284 is known in chronology as the era of Diocletian, or the era of the martyrs; an epoch long employed in the calculations of ecclesiastical writers, and still in use among Coptic Christians."—*Dict. of Greek and Roman Biog. and Mythology, Diocletian.*

initiation, under the most favourable auspices, into the art of war. A few particulars are necessary on this subject.

Although Diocletian was raised to the throne by the voice of the eastern army, and united the suffrages of the western legions also, on the death of Carinus, a few months later, he felt his position one of great difficulty and insecurity. The unsettled state of the government had encouraged insurrection amongst the soldiers, and hostility in nearly every extremity of the empire. In order to consolidate his power and, at the same time, to facilitate its operations over his vast dominions, he nominated Maximianus Herculius, a brave but ambitious general, as his coadjutor, giving him first the title of Cæsar, and afterwards of Augustus. This last promotion was publicly celebrated at Nicomedia, his favourite residence, in A.D. 286. The measure adopted was not without its advantages; but, in the course of the ensuing six years, the dangers that menaced the empire thickened on every hand, threatening its unity and its very existence. In Egypt and the valley of the Nile, at Carthage and amongst the clans of Mount Atlas, in Gaul and along all the northern boundaries of Europe, disturbances, more or less serious, demanded the strong hand of power to settle them; while the Persian monarch had recovered Mesopotamia, and was seeking to regain possession of the whole of Asia Minor. In the midst of these troubles, Diocletian determined upon the extension of the plan already adopted, by augmenting the number of rulers and dividing the responsibilities of empire between them. The plan ultimately fixed upon, and carried into effect in A.D. 292, was to distribute the ruling power amongst four persons, two of whom were to have the highest honours, and to be entitled Augusti, while the remaining two were to be second only to the former, and to be entitled Cæsars. At the same time, the empire was to be divided into four parts, each of which was to secure the undivided attention of an ever-present and governing head. The merits of this plan have been variously estimated, and by one great authority have been considered trivial.* It can

* Niebuhr's Lectures on the History of Rome, vol. iii. p. 349.

scarcely be disputed, however, that, as a temporary expedient, it answered its purpose, and preserved the empire from the disintegration with which it was threatened.

Diocletian and Maximian retained to themselves the title and honours of Augusti, or supreme rulers, and nominated to the newly-created rank of Cæsars Galerius, an Illyrian, who had distinguished himself by his courage and ability in several successful battles, and Constantius, the father of Constantine, whose valour, firmness, and prudence, had attracted the favourable notice of the rulers of the world before Diocletian arrived at the place of supreme power. The promotion of the parent could not fail to have great influence on the son, now in his nineteenth year. There was presented to his youthful and ardent mind the possible contingency of his becoming the heir of his father's greatness, should his character and genius prove not unsuitable to such high honours. We have no direct evidence respecting his expectations at this conjuncture; yet the uniform testimony as to his conduct is such as to justify the inference that he was animated in no small degree by the idea that, at some future day, it might fall to his lot to participate in the toils and rewards of imperial dominion.

The elevation of Constantius was attended by a circumstance that could scarcely fail to inflict a deep wound on the feelings of his son. It was part of the plan already adverted to, that both Galerius and Constantius should repudiate their wives and form new alliances out of the families of the Augusti. It was imagined, no doubt, by Diocletian—although foolishly, as the course of after events sufficiently proved—that by making the domestic auxiliary to the imperial policy, the union between the four princes would partake of all the strength of a family relationship. Galerius married Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian, and Constantius Theodora, the step-daughter of Maximian. Although a stigma would appear to be cast not only on Helena, but her son likewise, we do not perceive any evidence whatever that Constantius was in any degree alienated from him by this arrangement. Probably, in an

age like that, and especially amongst princes, little was thought of such a step except by those who were the immediate sufferers. One thing is certain; namely, that, in the after period of his life, Constantine wholly removed the disgrace of his mother's divorce by the honours he bestowed upon her, and the respect he exacted from all by whom she was surrounded.

CHAPTER III.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GOVERNMENT UNDER THE NEW SYSTEM—THE CHARACTER OF CONSTANTINE AT THIS PERIOD—RETAINED BY DIOCLETIAN AS A KIND OF HOSTAGE—SERVES UNDER DIOCLETIAN IN THE EXPEDITION TO EGYPT—AFTERWARDS ACCOMPANIES GALERIUS IN THE PERSIAN WAR—IS PROMOTED TO THE MILITARY TRIBUNESHIP — JEALOUSY OF GALERIUS — CONSTANTINE'S DIFFICULTIES INCREASE WHEN DIOCLETIAN AND MAXIMIAN RESIGN THE PURPLE — CONDUCT OF CONSTANTINE AND HIS FATHER TOWARDS GALERIUS—SLIGHT PUT UPON CONSTANTINE —HIS FATHER, NOW AUGUSTUS, SEEKS HIS RESCUE FROM GALERIUS—CONSTANTINE'S ESCAPE. A.D. 292—305.

WITH the events mentioned in the last chapter a new epoch opens before us in the life of Constantine. The empire was now under the dominion of four rulers. Diocletian governed Egypt, Thrace, Syria, and Asia, and established his court at Nicomedia; Maximian ruled over Africa and Italy, together with Sicily and the islands of the Tyrrhenian sea, and resided at Milan; Galerius was entrusted with Illyricum, and the whole line of the Danube, with Sirmium for a capital; and Constantius was appointed to exercise dominion in the west, over Gaul, Spain, Britain, and Mauretania, countries already united by Postumus and Tetricus, with Treves as the seat of government. Constantine was now in his nineteenth year. He had probably served, up to this time, under his father in Dalmatia, and had given early promise of many of those qualities by which he was afterwards distinguished. He was temperate, courageous, prudent, and inspired his fellow-soldiers with a large measure of his own intrepidity. It would have seemed natural for

him to accompany his father to the west, on his elevation to the dignity of Cæsar; nor does it appear that anything but mutual confidence subsisted between the father and son. Indeed, the sequel renders it evident that they never lost sight of each other, although separated for a long season through the operation of an artful policy. Diocletian, ever wary in all his arrangements, especially in the years of his manly vigour, was not altogether free from apprehension respecting the possible ambition of his associates in power. Although, therefore, Constantius had repudiated Helena, and thereby not only submitted to his plans, but also loosened the tie which bound him to Constantine, he deemed it prudent to retain the latter in his own service and under his own eye, as a kind of hostage for the fidelity of his parent.

During this period, the young man acquitted himself in a satisfactory manner, and improved every opportunity of acquainting himself with the art of war. While his father was busily employed in restoring the west to subjection, Constantine accompanied Diocletian in his celebrated expedition into Egypt, took part in the capture of Alexandria, and the pacification of the surrounding country. The last-named object was effected in A.D. 296. Eusebius has given an account of the impression which the appearance and bearing of Constantine made upon his own mind at this period; and, although full allowance must be made for the exaggeration to which he was so prone, especially in everything that relates to the subject of his panegyric, there is probably some truth in the representation. "Constantine," he writes, "had been already accustomed to the society of his father's imperial colleagues, and had passed his time among them, like God's ancient prophet, Moses, as we have said. And, even in the very earliest period of his youth, he was judged by them to be worthy of the highest honour. An instance of this we have ourselves seen, when he passed through Palestine with the senior emperor, at whose right hand he stood, and commanded the admiration of all who beheld him, by the indications he gave even then of royal greatness. For no one was comparable to him for grace

and beauty of person, or height of stature; and he so far surpassed his compeers in personal strength, as to be a terror to them. He was, however, more conspicuous for the excellence of his mental qualities, than for his superior personal endowments; being gifted, in the first place, with a sound and temperate judgment, and having also reaped the advantages of a liberal education. He was also distinguished, in no ordinary degree, both by natural intelligence and divinely-imparted wisdom."*

After this, Constantine accompanied Galerius in his second expedition against Narses, the king of Persia. The first, undertaken in A.D. 296, had failed. Mortified by the defeat he had experienced on the plains of Carrhæ, and yet more by the humbling treatment of Diocletian, who poured contempt upon the vanquished Cæsar, he determined to renew the contest in the following year. For this purpose, he recruited his shattered army from Illyricum, Mœsia, and Dacia, and augmented his troops to the number of twenty-five thousand men. This second expedition was completely successful, and resulted in the overthrow of the Persians, the restoration of Tiridates to the throne of Armenia, and the subjugation of Mesopotamia and five provinces beyond the Tigris to the dominion of Rome.†

In these wars Constantine had acted so conspicuous a part, not only by personal bravery, but by the higher military qualities of foresight, prudence, and generalship, that he was promoted to be a tribune of the first class. This rank, which must be distinguished from the civil tribuneship, was the highest the military service could bestow on its faithful servants. For the same reason, he became a favourite with the veterans of the army, who were proud to follow where he might lead, as he had done, to conquest and victory.

Those causes, however, which brought fame and honour

* Life of Constantine, b. i. c. 20.

† Niebuhr (lect. lxxviii.) makes this to have happened in 296. But this must be an error. The first expedition took place in that year. See the authorities in Manso's Leben Constantins, pp. 352, 353. Constantine was with Diocletian during the first, but joined Galerius in the second and successful, expedition.

to the youthful hero, inflamed the jealousy of Galerius, and rendered him apprehensive of his own position. Constantine was not without enemies on this account. There were spies to watch his conduct, and plots to destroy his reputation. But for his vigilant and circumspect behaviour, he might have been either ruined or disgraced. All arts that a base nature could prompt were sanctioned, if not instigated, by the jealous Cæsar, to put this prominent warrior out of his way, without having the deed brought home to himself; but without success. Instead of committing himself, he learned prudence by the very difficulties of his position, and augmented his own influence by the very firmness and amenity of character thereby acquired. While his natural cheerfulness and frankness never forsook him, he became wary in all his dealings, and so acquitted himself, that not even his enemies could find any accusation against him. In all this, he was preparing for the arduous post to which he was destined in the course of a few years.

These difficulties increased instead of diminishing, when Diocletian resigned the purple and retired into private life. Enfeebled by illness, which had confined him to the palace of Nicomedia the whole of the previous year, he was induced to take this step in A.D. 305. There can be little doubt that Galerius, whose ambition had become apparent ever since his success in the Persian war, was the cause of this. It was his object to secure for himself the honours of the chief Augustus, if not to become in the end sole ruler of the empire. He had already gained considerable influence over the mind of Diocletian, as was abundantly proved by the manner in which he procured from him an edict for the persecution of the Christians; and found it a comparatively easy matter to persuade him to resign the care of government to younger and abler hands.* Maximian was not so easily led to fall in with the plans of Galerius. Brave, restless, fond of participating in the dangers as well

* According to Vopiscus, Diocletian felt, afterwards, that he was deceived, or, to use his own word, *sold*. "Quid multa? Bonus, cautus, optimus venditur Imperator. Hæc Diocletiani verba sunt." Scriptt. Hist. Aug. t. ii. p. 550; cited by Manso, p. 12, *note* y.

as glory of empire, it was some time before he could be moved to imitate the example of his colleague. But, at length, he yielded, though reluctantly, and from prudential considerations, rather than from any love for a life of retirement.* Both Augusti, therefore, resigned all the honours and responsibilities of government at the same time, Diocletian at Nicomedia, and Maximian at Milan; and were succeeded by Galerius and Constantius, according to the plan of the new constitution.

Galerius had now all the more reason to be jealous of the growing reputation of Constantine. Constantius, also, was in a somewhat infirm state of health,† and thus afforded him the prospect of speedily gaining the whole object of his ambition, if the son could be either got rid of or set aside by prudent management. Constantine was, therefore, still retained under his eye; neither did Constantius demand his liberty, knowing, as he did, that his rival might, if provoked, easily procure his death, without having the crime brought home to its real author. The aim of both father and son was now to secure their object by peaceable and patient means. Nothing could surpass the prudence with which the affair was managed, and that, too, in spite of many exasperating circumstances. Galerius, it is said, had often placed Constantine in positions of danger, which he might have refused to occupy, or against which he might, at least, have remonstrated. Feeling, however, his own ability, he entered fearlessly upon every duty assigned him, and always came off successful. Many are the stories related of him in reference to this matter, but with what truth it is difficult to determine. It must have been galling to the temper of both father and son to be the subjects of such artful designs.‡

At the same time, Galerius endeavoured to provoke a

* Eumenius, in Paneg. vi. 15, 6; Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 18.

† Eusebius, book i. chap. 18, and Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 20, speak of Constantius as chief Augustus. The latter mentions, as a reason for the contumelious conduct of Galerius, that Constantius was in such feeble health that he was not expected to live.

‡ Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 24.

spirit of resentment that would justify violent measures on his part. Instead of consulting Constantius on the appointment of Cæsars, and paying honour to his fellow Augustus, by nominating one of the two, at least, from his family, he took it upon himself to appoint two of his own creatures to the vacant offices. These were Severus and Maximin Daza, neither of whom could be compared, for moral or military worth, with the son of Constantius. Under this provocation, however, the father and son remained passive, and showed no resentment. All that was now done was to open up negotiations with Galerius for the removal of Constantine to his imperial home in the west. The matter was managed with great caution and in a spirit of conciliation on the part of Constantius, that in the end proved successful. Galerius delayed, excused himself, made many protestations that it would be better for Constantine to remain with him; but the reiterated solicitations of the parent were so plausible, so natural, so urgent, that, at length, he yielded. In a favourable mood, he granted the desired permission. Without a moment's delay, Constantine acted upon it. He knew with whom he had to deal—that, as suddenly as he had granted permission, he might retract it; that plots might be made to cut him off on his way, were time allowed for such a purpose; and that his safety consisted in immediate flight. All his measures, therefore, were immediately taken, if they had not been concerted beforehand. It was at night, at supper, that Galerius granted the oft-repeated request; and he retired to rest without imagining that his word would take effect so speedily. When he arose, late in the following day, he learnt that his victim had escaped. Without taking leave of his patron, Constantine had started at once from Nicomedia, and, by relays of horse, had passed far beyond all possibility of recovery. Travelling with incredible speed through Thrace, Illyricum, Pannonia, and Gaul, he reached his father at Gesoriacum, or Boulogne, in time to accompany him in his expedition against the Picts. This happened in A.D. 305.*

* Lactantius gives a lively account of the whole transaction: De Mort. Persecut. 18, 19.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSTANTINE AND THE WAR AGAINST THE PICTS—THE DEATH OF CONSTANTIUS—HIS CHARACTER—THE POSITION OF CONSTANTINE—HIS POLITIC CONDUCT—GALERIUS REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AS AUGUSTUS—ACTS AS CÆSAR—HIS GOVERNMENT IN THE WEST AT THE FIRST—USURPATION OF MAXIMIAN AND MAXENTIUS—SEVERUS REPELLED BY THE ROMANS, AND PUT TO DEATH—CONSTANTINE MARRIES FAUSTA, AND ELEVATED TO THE RANK OF AUGUSTUS—GALERIUS REPELLED BY THE ROMANS—THE DEMEANOUR OF CONSTANTINE DURING THESE EVENTS—LICINIUS CHOSEN AUGUSTUS IN THE ROOM OF SEVERUS. A.D. 305—307.

THE war against the Picts was soon terminated.* What part Constantine took in it, it is difficult to say. It is probable that he had the principal command under, if not in place of, his father, whose increasing infirmities had now for some time unfitted him for much personal activity. An opportunity was thereby afforded of confirming the reputation that had preceded him, and of inspiring the army of the west with that admiration for his military qualities which contributed so much to his future advancement.

Shortly after this expedition, Constantius was seized with a mortal illness, and died at York, on the 25th of July, 306, fifteen months after his elevation to the imperial dignity. His decease was lamented as a public calamity. The comparative purity of his life, and moderation of his

* Zosimus, ii. 8, 2; Paneg. vi. 7, 5. Lactantius does not mention this war; but writes as if Constantine reached his father just before his death. Eusebius mentions his reducing the British nations to submission *after* his accession. Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 25.

government, secured the obedience of the conquered nations of the west; while the prudence, firmness, and intrepidity of his bearing, in seasons of warfare and public danger, commanded the confidence of the legions. When he received the appointment of Cæsar, Gaul was in a state of rebellion, and Britain had been for some years separated by successful insurrection from the empire. Carausius, a Menapian,* who had gained over the troops quartered in Britain, and established himself as an Augustus and colleague of Diocletian and Maximian, was assassinated and succeeded by Allectus, his own general, A.D. 293. After a struggle of three years, Constantius routed the armies of the usurper, and recovered the whole island. After this, he defeated the Alemanni in two general engagements, and effected the pacification of Gaul. Thus his presence had saved the west from being separated from the imperial dominion, while the troops under his command had acquired a reputation for valour that made their very name formidable to their enemies. All contemporary writers speak well of Constantius; but it is still an unsettled question, whether he was a truly christian man in character and profession. Theophanes describes him as a man of christian principles.† Eusebius is loud in his praise. He speaks of his government as mild and tranquil; of his temper, as mild and gentle; of his piety, as extraordinary and elevated; and concludes his eulogy in the following terms:—"Accordingly, during the whole course of his quiet and peaceful reign, he dedicated his entire household, his children, his wife, and domestic attendants, to the one Supreme God; so that the company assembled within the walls of his palace differed in no respect from a church of God; wherein were also to be found his ministers, who offered continual supplications on

* Menapia was a district between the Scheldt and Meuse. Carausius was a singular man, with singular fortunes. Of humble birth, he excelled both as pilot and soldier, and seized upon Britain to avoid his own threatened death, on account of the encouragement he had afforded to piracy.

† Χριστιανοφρων. But Theophanes lived and wrote in the ninth century.

behalf of their prince, and this at a time when, generally speaking, it was not allowable to make any allusion, even by name, to the worshippers of God."* All probability is against such a representation as this. Even Lactantius, whose partiality for the family of Constantius leads him to many exaggerated statements, does not go so far. He tells us that Constantius favoured the Christians during the Diocletian persecutions; but his commendation amounts to no more than this: that while the other rulers threw down the sanctuaries, and imprisoned or destroyed the worshippers, Constantius sanctioned the destruction of the material temples, but preserved sacred "the temple of God which is in men."†

If Constantine had been an ordinary man, he would have felt his position at this juncture to be one of immense difficulty and danger. His father had nominated him as his successor on his dying bed; and had been moved to this step by affection and confidence, no less than by a prudential regard to the circumstances of his family. Of his other sons, by Theodora, the oldest was scarcely more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, and, therefore, utterly incapable of defending a position encompassed with perils; while, by making Constantine his heir, he cut off all occasions of jealousy on his part, and secured his good offices for the other branches of his family. On the other hand, Constantine could not but be sensible that, ever since his mother's repudiation, he had lain under a stigma which not all his valour and prudent behaviour could remove—a stigma which Galerius had already made the pretext for the dishonour cast upon the son of Helena, and which he would be the last to ignore. He also perceived that the inevitable result of his accession to the throne of the west would be to inflame the hostility of his enemy, already incensed against him because he had escaped from his toils. In this crisis, however, neither courage, nor confidence in his own ability to cope with the dangers that surrounded him, were wanting.

* Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 17.

† De Mort. Persecut. 15. "Conventicula dirui passus est, verum utem Dei templum, quod est in hominibus, incolume servavit."

The part that he played has been signalized as one of the proofs of his genius for government.*

So soon as Constantius had expired, Constantine clothed himself with the purple, and, to use the words of Eusebius, "proceeded from the palace, presenting to all a renewal, as it were, in his own person of his father's life and reign. He then conducted the funeral procession in company with his father's friends, and performed the last offices for the pious deceased with extraordinary magnificence."† Meanwhile, all united in acclamations and joyful shouts, and hailed him as their new sovereign by the titles of Imperial and Worshipful Augustus. Both the regular troops and auxiliaries proclaimed him emperor, and saluted him as their sole and rightful chief. Looking down from his throne on the brave legions, whose enthusiasm was raised to the highest pitch of devotion, Constantine must have felt himself secure alike against enemies and rivals; yet he acted prudently and cautiously, as if his final success depended on the exercise of these qualities, quite as much as upon superiority of arms. His first act, therefore, after his accession, was one of courtesy and conciliation. He sent messengers to Galerius, announcing the fact of his father's death, excusing himself in that the army had proclaimed him emperor, and requesting, in modest terms, to be acknowledged by Galerius as his associate in empire.‡ At the same time, knowing the haughty and uncertain temper of his rival, and deeming it possible that he might reject his claims altogether, he col-

* The opinion of Niebuhr respecting Constantine at this period is worth quoting:—"At the time of his father's death, 306, Constantine was thirty-two years old. He was a truly distinguished man, and had acquired great reputation under Diocletian, so that the attention of the Roman world was drawn towards him. He was not a man of great literary acquirements, like some of his predecessors; but he was, at the same time, anything but a rash barbarian; he spoke Latin and Greek, without being a learned man."—*Lectures on the History of Rome*, lect. 78.

† Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 22.

‡ Lactantius mentions that he sent his image to Galerius, whom he designates by no very mild term—"Laureata imago allata est ad malam bestiam." (De Mort. Persecut. 25.) See also Zosimus, ii. 9, 2.

lected his army, and prepared to enforce them by decisive measures, if needful.

Galerius received the tidings in a storm of anger, and determined to disown the election of the army of the west. But, on consideration, he took a more prudent course. Concealing his chagrin, he despatched a messenger to the court of Constantine, and, without confirming the appointment, bestowed on him the inferior dignity of Cæsar; at the same time nominating Severus to the rank of Augustus, and Maximin Daza to precedence over Constantine as the elder Cæsar. Although a slight was thus put upon the son of Constantius, it was quite as much as he could expect from one who had shown him so much disfavour. Constantine, therefore, dissembled his dissatisfaction, and waited for an opportunity of proving that he was fully equal to any post of honour or danger.

His first care was to consolidate his empire in the west, and to put his troops under a course of discipline that would fit them for any of those severe enterprises which circumstances might require. For some time he pursued his own aims unmolested, except by an insurrection in Gaul, headed by Ascaricus and Regaisus, which was speedily subdued*—the guardian of his father's house, and the benefactor of his subjects. The army was devoted to his person, and enthusiastic in obedience to his commands. The moderate policy of his father was confirmed under his administration. In some instances, he remitted a portion of the taxes, and revised the operation of the capitation tax. He respected the rights of citizens, and the conscientious convictions of the religious. According to Lactantius, his first care was to restore the Christians to their worship and their God, and to give his sanction to their holy religion.† It appears certain that, without embracing christianity himself, he threw around its professors the

* This insurrection had been fomented during the absence of Constantius in Britain. Gibbon places it much later. Manso correctly places it in the first year of Constantine. See Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 25, 356. On this subject see Paneg. v. 4, 2; ix. 6, 5; vi. 10, 2, cited by Manso.

† De Mort. Persecut. 24.

shield of his protection, and even advanced them to places of trust and honour. Indeed, the early period of the reign of Constantine, if not the most brilliant, is by far the most pleasing to contemplate. Such was the firmness and vigilance of his government, that none ventured to dispute his supremacy; and, with the exception of the barbarous punishment inflicted on the insurgent Franks, such was the impartiality and moderation of his administration, that he was as much beloved as he was respected and feared.

Flattering, however, as was the condition of the west, it was impossible for Constantine to be long at peace, in consequence of events arising from the oppressive conduct or ambitious projects of those who shared with him in the general government. Constantine was not the only person who felt that a slight was put upon him when Galerius nominated his son Severus to the rank of Augustus, and Maximian Daza, his nephew, to that of first Cæsar. Maximian, the colleague of Diocletian, had a son, Maxentius, who thought himself, notwithstanding his vices and incapacity, quite as much entitled to promotion as any of those who now divided the empire between them. He had also married the daughter of Galerius, which gave him additional reason for anticipating a share, at least, in the general government. Ever since the period when Galerius and Constantine had been made Cæsars, he had lived in comparative security in his suburban villa near Rome, cherishing his discontent, and only waiting for a favourable opportunity of affording a practical exhibition of his resentment. That opportunity had now arrived. His father had most reluctantly laid aside the imperial purple, and could ill brook a life of retirement. At the same time, the citizens of Rome were discontented, through various causes, and were prepared to rise in vindication of their own rights and privileges. For some time, their city—the capital city of the empire—had been neglected. While Nicomedia, Milan, and Treves were honoured by the presence and courts of the several rulers, Rome was shunned, as if the very air was pestilential. It was in vain that magnificent baths were erected for the public use, while the city itself

was avoided. Besides this, Galerius had oppressed them with new taxes, extorted from them by the most inquisitorial and stringent methods. Their indignation, at length, reached its limits; and entering into a conspiracy with Maxentius, whose disappointed ambition was no secret to them, they determined to throw off the despotic yoke of Galerius, and elect a sovereign who would reside amongst them and restore the splendours of a court to their ancient city. The plans adopted were successful. The faithful servants of Galerius were overpowered and massacred; Maxentius was invested with the insignia of sovereignty, and proclaimed emperor on the 27th of October, 306; and, about the same time, Maximian, escaping from his retirement in Lucania, re-assumed the purple and title of Augustus. All Italy yielded to the example of Rome, and even Africa acquiesced in the choice of the new ruler.

Severus, recently called to preside over the affairs of this province, immediately hastened towards Rome, to chastise the abettors of this unlooked-for usurpation. But his troops became dispirited and disaffected, and many deserted to the enemy. He was, therefore, compelled to flee. For a season he shut himself up in Ravenna. But, at length, he capitulated; abdicated the throne of Italy; and in the end was put to death by Maximian, in February,* 307.

Such was the condition of the empire shortly after the accession of Constantine. Maximian and Maxentius were masters of Italy, Galerius and Maximin Daza of the east, and Constantine of all the countries west of the Alps. Constantine had looked calmly on, without attempting to interfere in disputes that might issue to his advantage. He now saw the haughty Galerius too much occupied with troubles near at home to think of molesting him; he, therefore, turned his attention to his own dominions with fresh confidence and energy. But it was the policy of Maximian and Maxentius to strengthen their position of successful usurpation. They, therefore, courted the friendship of Constantine; and the aged emperor crossed the Alps, in

* According to some, August. There is some discrepancy also respecting the place.

order to cement an alliance so desirable by offering him his younger daughter, Fausta, in marriage.* Constantine had been married before this to Minervina, of whom little or nothing is now known, and by whom he had an only child, the unfortunate Crispus. But she was now dead.† Constantine, therefore, accepted the overture, and the nuptials were celebrated at Arles with great pomp and magnificence. At the same time, the title of Augustus was conferred upon Constantine by his father-in-law. By accepting the purple from such hands, he acknowledged the authority of Maximian and of the Roman senate, and, of necessity, widened the breach between himself and Galerius. But nothing more. He still kept himself aloof from the contest that had not yet come to its term.

Meanwhile, Galerius, maddened by the revolutionary movements in Italy, collected a large army, and advanced towards Rome for the purpose of avenging the humiliating defeat and death of Severus, and of regaining the lost province of his dominions. But he miscalculated his own ability to cope with the difficulties of the emergency. Maximian was speedily at his post, and, such were his skilful arrangements, that Galerius found nearly every

* Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 27. Fausta and Maxentius were the offspring of Eutropia, a Syrian woman. Victor in Epit. 40, 12. Manso, p. 29.

† Some obscurity rests upon this part of Constantine's life, not yet cleared up. Zosimus (ii. 20, 3) and Victor (Epit. 41, 4) speak of Minervina as his concubine. But, in the oration pronounced by the unknown panegyrist on the occasion of the celebration of the nuptials between Constantine and Fausta, we have the fact of the marriage distinctly asserted:—"Quo enim magis continentiam patris æquare potuisti, quam quod te, ab ipso fine pueritiæ, illico matrimonii legibus tradidisti?" (Paneg. v. 4, 1.) The Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography overlooks this. Gibbon refers to it at second hand, but quotes incorrectly. It is scarcely possible that such language would have been used on such an occasion if there had been no marriage. Manso suggests (p. 378) that the marriage was recognised as valid some years after the union. But this does not remove the difficulty. The panegyrist is too precise to allow of any such construction.

place on his march inaccessible or hostile, and with great difficulty forced his way as far as Narni, sixty miles from Rome. Under these circumstances, he found it necessary to change his policy. At the outset, he had threatened to extirpate the senate and destroy the citizens with the sword, if they did not immediately surrender themselves to his rightful authority. Now, he adopted a mild and conciliatory tone, promised liberal things, and demanded a conference. But his character was too well known, and his overtures had come too late. The Romans treated his proposals with scorn, and he was compelled to retire from a contest in which he would certainly be unsuccessful. Indeed, such was the animosity of the Romans, that his retreat was attended with great loss, while Galerius himself narrowly escaped the same fate as Severus. But the greatest sufferers in this expedition were the inhabitants of the various districts through which the retreating army passed. Pillage and plunder were the least of those crimes which the troops committed and Galerius sanctioned.*

During this struggle, Constantine looked on, prepared for war if necessary; but prudently declined all interference when the issue was apparent. Maximian sought his aid in pursuing and vanquishing the army of Galerius; but he was immoveable. No doubt, it was the object of Maximian to wrest the empire from the hands of the Augustus of the east, and restore to Rome its ancient supremacy. But Constantine was too prudent to desire such a result, were it attainable. Having nothing to fear from his old enemy, and, at the same time, not quite so much confidence in Maximian and his son, Maxentius, as they supposed, he remained neutral. In a short time, the course of events

* Gibbon says, "They murdered, they ravaged, they plundered, they drove away the flocks and herds of the Italians; they burnt the villages through which they passed, and they endeavoured to destroy the country which it had not been in their power to subdue." (History of the Decline and Fall, chap. 14.) But even this is tame in comparison with Lactantius, (De Mort. Persecut. 27.) This writer also mentions that Galerius wished to change the name of the empire from Roman to Dacian.

proved his foresight. So soon as Maxentius felt himself secure in his new dominion, he began to reveal his true character. Abandoning himself to every species of excess and cruelty, he, at length, drew down upon himself the resentment and hatred of those who had so valiantly espoused his cause.

When Galerius returned to his capital in the east, he chose Licinius, his early friend and companion in arms, though originally a Dacian peasant, as Augustus, in the room of Severus; and, shortly afterwards, he was compelled, by motives of policy, to admit Maximin Daza to the same honours. Thus there were, at this singular period, six Augusti:—Galerius, Licinius, and Maximin Daza, in the east; and Maximian, Maxentius, and Constantine, in the west. It was a distracted period. No one hand was strong enough to gain and hold the mastery. Nor did it seem, at the time, at all likely that he who had accepted the dignity of Augustus from a usurper, and whose general bearing was so free from all appearance of pretence and ambition—who carried it so meekly with Galerius when the highest honours were refused him, and who seemed so unwilling to embroil himself in the war for dominion—would, in so short a period, wrest the sceptre from so many hands, and come off, as he did, victor and sole ruler. The course of events by which this consummation was arrived at, affords an opportunity for illustrating the true character of Constantine, and forms one of the most remarkable chapters in the history of human ambition.

CHAPTER V.

DISPUTES BETWEEN MAXIMIAN AND MAXENTIUS—THE FORMER FLEES INTO GAUL—HIS ATTEMPTED USURPATION OF THE DOMINION OF CONSTANTINE—DISCREPANCY OF HISTORIANS RESPECTING THE ISSUE OF THIS EVENT — THE MOTIVES OF CONSTANTINE IN PUTTING MAXIMIAN TO DEATH—THE PANEGYRIC OF EUMENIUS —THE DEATH OF GALERIUS — HIS LAST YEARS — HIS EDICT GRANTING TOLERATION TO THE CHRISTIANS—ITS PROBABLE EFFECT ON THE MIND OF CONSTANTINE—THE STATE OF THE EMPIRE AFTER THE DEATH OF GALERIUS. A.D. 307—311.

THE first direct step onward in Constantine's career was occasioned by the disputes between Maximian and Maxentius. The latter, as we have already hinted, gave way to all the base impulses of his nature, so soon as he found himself in the place of power. His father, who had espoused his cause, and whose military skill had materially contributed to his establishment on the throne, was now felt to be in the way. For a brief period, harmony prevailed; but when Maxentius was assured of his security from the powerful Galerius, dreading no further foe, he began to spurn the counsels and to disdain the authority of Maximian.* The discussion grew, at length, into an open feud; and the cause was submitted to the prætorian guards, or, in other words, the

* Lactantius states that, although the ruling power was equally shared between Maximian and Maxentius, greater deference was paid to the latter than to the former. (De Mort. Persecut. 28.) It is difficult to ascertain the whole truth in reference to the dispute between the two. Probably, there were faults on both sides. One of the panegyrists states, that Maximinian endeavoured to take the purple by force from Maxentius. (Paneg. viii. 3, 4; so, also, Lactantius.)

standing army, posted in Rome. Maxentius prevailed, and Maximian, expelled from Italy by his own son, and by the very troops he had headed with so much courage, was compelled to retire to Illyricum. Even there, however, he was not long permitted to remain. Galerius, who dreaded his very name, refused him the asylum he had sought in his dominions, and again he was obliged to flee. His last resort, therefore, was with his son-in-law, Constantine, who received him with all reverence, and entertained him with all the honours due to so distinguished a relative.* Maximian once more resigned the imperial purple, and professed to be cured of all the vain ambition that had hitherto marked his career. He might now have spent the remainder of his days in peace and retirement, had his purpose been sincere. It would appear, however, that his restless spirit could not brook a life of inglorious ease. Like an old warrior, he thirsted for danger, and panted for battle. Visions of regained dominion floated before his eyes, and seduced him into conspiracy. Neither the punctilious respect of his son-in-law, nor the filial tenderness of his daughter, could cool his passion for government. Misinterpreting, therefore, the character and ability of Constantine, and imagining that it would be an easy thing, under a favourable opportunity, to effect a successful usurpation, he determined, if possible, to supplant him, and procure into his own hands the empire of the west. What gloomy thoughts further occupied his mind, we know not; but it is probable that, had he succeeded, Maxentius would have paid dearly for his unfilial conduct, and the arms of Maximian might have accomplished what was afterwards reserved for the legions of Constantine.

The season so much desired by Maximian, at length, arrived. Constantine was summoned to the northern frontier to repel an incursion of the Franks. Not dreaming of treachery at home, he took with him only a small portion of his army, and proceeded against the enemy. Another portion of the army was posted on the frontiers of Italy,

* Paneg. vii. 14.

and the remainder was at head-quarters in the capital. According to Lactantius, Maximian had persuaded Constantine to take a smaller force than he had intended, in order that he might the more successfully accomplish his treacherous aims by corrupting the legions at Arles, during his absence, and turning their arms against their rightful sovereign. It is difficult to believe that so circumspect a ruler as Constantine would have listened to any such persuasions without suspecting their object, more especially as he was already sufficiently acquainted with the character of Maximian. Be this as it may, Constantine had not been long absent before Maximian began to put his plans into execution. Suddenly the news was spread abroad that Constantine was slain, and that the empire of the west devolved upon Maximian. Without scruple, the inventor of the falsehood ascended the throne, seized upon the public treasury, and distributed large sums of money among the soldiers. Everything seemed to favour the usurpation, and Maximian saw, or thought he saw, the success of his artful scheme. But Constantine, ever on the alert against faction at home, as well as aggression from abroad, was soon informed of the treachery of his guest. Instead of proceeding further against the Franks, he immediately embarked his troops, and descending the Saone and Rhine with great speed, reached the scene of revolt before Maximian was prepared for his reception. Seeing the danger of his position, Maximian fled to Marseilles, intending to escape thence by sea; but was followed too closely by his foe to effect his object. Marseilles was besieged by the army of Constantine, and held out for a short time; but, fearing the consequences of a resistance which, however protracted, could not be ultimately successful, the citizens capitulated under promise of pardon, and delivered the unfortunate usurper into the hands of his son-in-law.

There is considerable discrepancy in the statements of contemporary writers, respecting the issue of this event.*

* Gibbon rejects as fabulous the story narrated by Lactantius; Manso, however, embodies it in his life. See History of the

According to some Constantine doomed his victim to an easy but ignominious death, and betrayed his remorse by circulating the rumour that Maximian had committed suicide. According to others, he stript Maximian of the imperial robes, but, at the same time, granted him a free pardon. It is not easy to determine which account is the true one. The authorities for the latter statement further affirm that Maximian lived two years after this event, and was in the end put to death on account of repeated acts of treachery. They mention, in particular, that he abused the hospitality of Constantine, who permitted him to reside in the palace at Arles, by plotting against his life. His last attempt is described by Lactantius in the following terms: —"He called his daughter, Fausta, and solicited her, now by entreaties, and now by caresses, to betray her husband, promising her another and more worthy one; and requested that she would allow his bed to be left accessible and negligently guarded. She promised to do so; but immediately reported the fact to her lord. A plan was arranged by which his criminality might be made manifest. A certain eunuch, whose life was deemed of little importance, was substituted for the emperor. Early in the morning, Maximian rises, and perceives that everything favours his design. There were only a few up, and those at some distance from the chamber. He tells them, however, that he had seen something in a dream which he desired to relate to his son. He enters the chamber armed, and having beheaded the slave, returns leaping with joy, and confesses that he has done the deed. Suddenly, from another quarter, Constantine shows himself with a body of armed attendants. The dead body of the victim is brought forth from the bed; the murder is rendered manifest, and Maximian, struck dumb with astonishment, is accused of the impious crime, and adjudged to death." *

It matters little which of the two statements is the

Decline and Fall, chap. 14; and Leben Constantins des Grossen, p. 39. The latter has an able note on the subject in the appendix, pp. 302, 303.

* De Mort. Persecut. 30.

correct one, except that, according to the former account, Maximian ended his days in 307, while, according to the latter, the date of his death would be 310.* More importance attaches to the motives by which Constantine was actuated. Gibbon admits that Maximian was a usurper, and that he deserved his fate; but adds, that "we should find more reason to applaud the humanity of Constantine, if he had spared an old man, the benefactor of his father, and the father of his wife." † Niebuhr gives his view of the case in the following words:—"Maximian left Rome, and went to Constantine, his son-in-law, in Gaul. He was received there with friendship, but, whether it was that he formed hostile plans against Constantine—which is not at all improbable—or whatever may have been the cause, in short, Constantine became his enemy. Maximian, who could not maintain himself at Arles, fled to Marseilles. There he was besieged by Constantine, and sacrificed by his troops. He fell into the hands of his son-in-law, who at first quieted him with kind promises, but, soon after, put him to death, under the pretence that he had formed a fresh conspiracy." ‡ The admissions made by both these writers are sufficient, if not to justify the conduct of Constantine, at least to incline the balance in his favour. Putting all the facts together, it is difficult to conceive that he who received the outcast into his dominions, and entertained him with so much respect, at a time when all the world was against him, would have deliberately taken his life, had it not been for some such reasons as those advanced by Eusebius and Lactantius; neither is there any improbability from what we know of the character of Maximian, in the statements that have been made respecting his repeated acts of treachery against the government of Constantine. The circumstance that Maximian had conferred upon Constantine the two benefits of an imperial title and a wife, while it appears to aggravate the criminality of the latter,

* This is the date given by Manso. Leben Constantins des Grossen, p. 359.

† Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 14.

‡ Lectures on the Hist. of Rome, lect. lxxix.

on the supposition of Maximian's innocency, also serves to render more probable the story of his attempted usurpation and of his subsequent treachery. The very relation subsisting between father-in-law and son-in-law, benefactor and beneficiary, might be a reason, in the mind of a man like Maximian, for attempting what, in other circumstances, would never have been thought of.

It was shortly after this event that Eumenius, the rhetorician, delivered, at Treves, one of his celebrated panegyrics in praise of Constantine; magnifying all the leading events of his career, and extolling his virtues in the most exaggerated style.* Among other things he refers to the death of Maximian, and vindicates Constantine from every charge of harshness. Indeed, he insinuates that Maximian, although spared by his son-in-law, did not deem himself worthy of life, but had committed suicide. Little reliance, however, is to be placed on testimony delivered in presence of the victorious party, and before a subservient court. Whatever may be the opinion entertained of Constantine in relation to this unhappy event, it is certain that it removed another obstacle in the way of his advancement.

In May of the following year, 311, another and more formidable opponent terminated his life, under the most painful circumstances. This was his old rival and enemy, Galerius. The disease under which he suffered was of the most loathsome and excruciating nature, and has been minutely—only too minutely—described by some of his contemporaries.† "The last years of Galerius," says Gibbon, "were less shameful and unfortunate; and though he had filled with more glory the subordinate station of Cæsar than the superior rank of Augustus, he preserved, till the moment of his death, the first place among the princes of the Roman world. He survived his retreat from Italy about four years, and wisely relinquishing his views of universal

* Panegyricus Constantino Augusto dictus.

† Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. book viii. chap. 16, and Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 57. Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 33. Gibbon notices that these writers describe the symptoms and progress of the disease with singular accuracy and apparent pleasure.

empire, he devoted the remainder of his life to the enjoyment of pleasure, and to the execution of some works of public utility, among which we may distinguish the discharging into the Danube the superfluous waters of the lake Pelso, and the cutting down the immense forests that encompassed it; an operation worthy of a monarch, since it gave an extensive country to the agriculture of his Pannonian subjects."*

To this it may be added, that, a little before his death, and certainly during the lingering illness that preceded it, Galerius saw fit to change his policy in relation to the christian worship and profession. For many years he had been a bitter enemy, and was the real instigator of those cruel edicts, issued in the reign and name of Diocletian, under which the Christians had suffered so severely. Besides this, he had persecuted many of their most eminent and innocent men with the utmost wantonness, as if from personal enmity. Now, however, he seemed to relent; and whether it were that the sufferings he endured himself created unwonted sympathy with those whose tortures were the result of his own hostility, or whether he began to entertain surmises that the Christians might possibly be more in the right than he had once thought, certain it is that, on a sick bed, he relented, and began to pursue a new course. According to Eusebius, he confessed his sin to the supreme God, ordered his officers to stop the persecution, and, by an imperial ordinance and decree, commanded that they should hasten to rebuild the churches, that they might perform their accustomed devotions, and offer up prayers for the emperor's safety.† Lactantius bears similar testimony.‡ Both writers also give the substance of the edict, dated the 30th of April, 311. It was to the following effect:—

"Among other things which we have devised for the general good and advantage of the state, we had indeed determined before this to restore all things according to the ancient laws and public order of the Romans; and

* Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 14.

† Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. book viii. chap. 17.

‡ De Mort. Persecut. 33.

in order to provide for this, that the Christians also, who had left the religion of their fathers, should return to a good disposition. For, indeed, by some means such wilfulness had seized upon them, and such folly possessed them, that they would not follow the things anciently instituted, which, it may be, their own ancestors first determined upon; but, according to their own judgment, and as they liked, they made laws for themselves, which they observed, and by different methods they gathered together various congregations. And, in fine, when our decree was issued to the effect that they should betake themselves to the institutions of their ancestors, many were subjected to danger, many were even destroyed. But, since so large a number persevered in their determination, and we observed that they would neither offer the reverence and worship due to the gods, nor honour the God of the Christians; in the contemplation of our great clemency, and regarding our invariable practice to grant pardon to all men, we have believed it right to extend our most prompt indulgence to these also; so that there may be Christians once more, and that they may build their conventicles, care being had that they do nothing contrary to order. In another epistle, we will signify to the judges what they are required to observe. On this account, and along with this indulgence of ours, they ought to pray to their God for our welfare, and that of the state, and their own, that in every place the state may be kept in safety, and that they may live securely in their homes."*

The publication of this edict was most grateful to the Christians, although the death of Galerius, a few days afterwards, left it uncertain how long the indulgence might be continued. It is chiefly worthy of notice in this place, in relation to the effect it produced on the mind of Constantine. In a subsequent portion of our biography, we shall have to record and estimate his conduct in connexion with the same subject. The policy he followed up to this period, was the

* Lactantius, De Mort. Persecut. 34. Eusebius has translated his version of the decree from the Latin, and differs a little from this in some expressions.

one adopted and recommended by his father. The rites and ceremonies observed by him and his court were heathen; but the Christians were tolerated, and many were even employed in his service, as public functionaries and in the army. To what extent their religious scruples were regarded, has not been ascertained; but we have no proof that they suffered any civil loss for their profession. Constantine, equally with Constantius, had rather connived at, than openly sanctioned, the new religion. But the marked change in the conduct of Galerius, evinced by the decree just cited, would inevitably lead a reflecting mind like Constantine's, to review the whole subject, and may, possibly, have prepared the way for that decided course which he pursued a few years later. We may be certain that he would not fail to notice the effect produced by the indulgence on the spirit and conduct of the Christians. When he saw them come forth, as they did, from their hiding-places, greeting one another on account of the liberty afforded, and uniting in acts of fellowship and worship, as if no interruption had ever taken place; when, moreover, he coupled with this the fact that they were singularly free from all political aims, and were evidently actuated by the simple desire of pursuing their religious objects unmolested; he could scarcely avoid the conviction that any amount of favour bestowed on such a people would be amply rewarded by their confidence and support.

That such was the effect of the toleration now extended to the Christians, is abundantly testified by Eusebius. "When these things," he writes, "had thus been executed, all on a sudden, like a flash of light blazing from dense darkness, in every city one could see congregations collected, assemblies thronged, and the accustomed meeting held in the same places. Then, also, these noble wrestlers of religion, liberated from the hardships of labouring in the mines, were dismissed every one to his own country. Joyous and cheerful they proceeded through every city, filled with an inexpressible pleasure and a confidence which language is inadequate to explain. Numerous bodies thus pursued their journey through the public highways and

markets, celebrating the praises of God in songs and psalms. And they who a little before had been driven in bonds under a most merciless punishment, from their respective countries, you could now see regaining their homes and firehearths, with bright and exhilarated countenances; so that even they who before had exclaimed against us, seeing the wonder beyond all expectation, congratulated us on these events."*

On the death of Galerius, Maximin Daza and Licinius divided between them the vast province over which he had reigned during his later years. The Asiatic portion fell to the lot of Maximin, and the European portion, reaching from the Hellespont to Italy, to Licinius. About the same time, Alexander, who had assumed the purple in Africa during the troubles arising from the usurpation of Maxentius, lost his life in an engagement with the army of Rome, and by this means the whole of Africa came under the sway of Maxentius.† The empire was thus brought once more under the dominion of four masters, as in the time of Diocletian: but with this difference, that, during his reign, the chief power was in his own hands, Maximian being fellow Augustus, and Constantius and Galerius, Cæsars; whereas, at the present time, all four were of the same rank, and looking upon one another with the eye of jealousy and ambition.

* Eccl. Hist. book ix. chap. 1.

† Zosimus, ii. 12, 14. Victor in Cæsar, 40, 17—19. Alexander assumed the rank of Augustus in 307, and met with his death in 311. Manso, Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 40, 357, 360.

CHAPTER VI.

HOSTILITIES BETWEEN CONSTANTINE AND MAXENTIUS—THE ADMINISTRATION OF MAXENTIUS IN ITALY AND AFRICA—THE EMBASSY FROM ROME INVITING CONSTANTINE TO RID THEM OF THE TYRANT—THE ARMIES OF CONSTANTINE AND MAXENTIUS COMPARED—THE MOTIVES OF CONSTANTINE IN INVADING ITALY—THE STATEMENTS OF EUSEBIUS CONSIDERED—THE VISION AND DREAM OF CONSTANTINE, AS NARRATED BY EUSEBIUS—THE UNTRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STORY—THE STATEMENTS OF LACTANTIUS AND MALELA—THE PROBABLE ORIGIN OF THE FABLE. A.D. 311.

SHORTLY after these events, occasion of war arose between Constantine and Maxentius. On the death of Maximian, orders were given by Constantine that his titles should be erased, and the monuments erected to his memory be destroyed. This was only in accordance with custom in such cases. But Maxentius, whose unfilial conduct had been the cause of his father's troubles during his last years, and indeed, indirectly, of his untimely death, now professed to revere his memory, and to resent the ignominious treatment it had received. He retaliated, therefore, by causing the monuments erected to Constantine in Italy and Africa to be thrown down, and their inscriptions to be effaced in dishonour, and in disavowal of his imperial rank. At the same time, he put forth pretensions to be sole emperor of the west, and collected an army on the frontiers of Gaul, with which he threatened to invade Rhœtia. No doubt, Maxentius had been emboldened to take these haughty measures by the success that had hitherto attended all his military movements. Severus and Alexander had fallen before him, and even Galerius, the conqueror of Persia, had been compelled to fly before his victorious troops. Why,

then, should Constantine, who had not signalized himself, at least since his accession to the throne, in any engagement with an equal foe, presume upon escaping with impunity? In this spirit, and misinterpreting the causes of his past successes, as well as the military resources and superiority of Constantine, he provoked the enmity of the only rival whom at that time he had any great reason to fear. Constantine, at first, looked calmly on, and trusted to negotiation to bring about a reconciliation; but the determined hostility of Maxentius compelled him to assume another demeanour, and to put himself into a position for offensive proceedings.

The reaction produced in Italy, and more especially at Rome, by the rapacity and cruelty of Maxentius, hastened the determination of Constantine. Never had the walls of Rome sheltered a more despicable tyrant. Even Julian, whose hatred to the memory of Constantine induced him to soften the vices and exaggerate the virtues of all his rivals, has nothing to say in his favour. He excludes him from the banquet of the Cæsars, and speaks of his crimes with the greatest abhorrence. All other writers agree in painting his character in the blackest colours; while Niebuhr compares him to the infamous Caracalla.* The flourishing cities and districts of Africa were wasted and depopulated by his mercenaries. The most opulent families of Italy were impoverished and ruined by his extortions. No rank, nor age, nor sex, escaped his cruelty. The tenderest ties were violated to sate his lusts. Effeminate, shameless, abandoned to the worst passions that imbrute human nature, he was already an offence to the people over whom he ruled. The army, corrupted by his example, plundered those whose interests they were designed to protect; while unbounded license was granted, or rather forced upon them, for the gratification of their basest passions. Senators, citizens, and the people generally, were animated by a common feeling of detestation for the inhuman monster they had chosen as their sovereign.

It was in these circumstances that Maxentius provoked

* Lectures on the History of Rome, lect. lxxix.

Constantine to wage war against him. It has been asserted, but on somewhat doubtful authority, that the senate and people of Rome sent ambassadors secretly to Gaul, earnestly entreating the emperor of the west to rid them of the tyrant. It does not seem at all probable that any such embassy could have been concerted while Maxentius was present in the capital, with his prætorian guards around him, and his agents busily occupied as spies and inquisitors in every direction. The circumstance, also, that no contemporary writer mentions the fact, is sufficient to throw discredit on the story. It may be that certain private individuals, who had escaped from Rome, conveyed to Constantine correct tidings respecting the actual feelings of the senate and people generally, and that this was magnified by later writers into a deliberate and formal embassy.* It is certain that sufficient intelligence reached Constantine, respecting the effect produced on the Roman people by the doings of Maxentius, to confirm him in his purpose of invading Italy. Some of his generals, we are informed, feared the result of this expedition, and advised him to desist from the enterprise.† But Constantine remained firm, and threw himself into the work, with all the determination and energy of a man resolved to succeed or perish.

The military resources of Maxentius, if estimated by numbers merely, were sufficient to induce Constantine to pause before attacking so formidable an enemy. His troops, collected from Italy, Africa, and Sicily, amounted to one hundred and seventy thousand foot, and eighteen thousand horse; while the entire force of Constantine numbered no more than ninety thousand foot, and eight thousand horse,

* The only writers who mention the embassy are Cedrenus, in his Compendium Historiarum (1606, p. 270), and Zonaras, in his Annales, lib. xlii. The former lived in the eleventh, and the latter in the twelfth century. Gibbon adopts the story, but on insufficient grounds (Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., c. 14). Manso rejects it (Leben Constantins des Grossen, p. 42, note *t*). If such a circumstance had happened, it would scarcely have been overlooked by Eusebius, Lactantius, and the Panegyrists.

† Paneg. ix. 2.

a portion of which only were available for the invasion of Italy. But the fact could not escape the observation of so experienced a general, that many of the levies by which the army of Maxentius had been augmented were raw recruits, unaccustomed to war; that his cavalry, encumbered with armour, were formidable in appearance rather than in reality; and that military discipline, without which even the bravest and largest armies are little worth, had been almost totally neglected since the days when Maximian shared with his son the government of Italy. He must have felt convinced that his own forces, though inferior in point of numbers, were more than equal to those of his foe, by virtue of the discipline under which they had been habitually trained, and the active service in which they had been incessantly engaged. Besides this, Constantine knew that the prætorian guards, to whom Maxentius chiefly looked for safety, and who were generally considered as the flower of his army, had been so utterly spoiled by the indulgence of the emperor, that they would never be able to stand the charge of his own hardy troops. Animated, therefore, by strong confidence respecting the issue of the enterprise, he set forth at once on his great undertaking.

It seems necessary to mention in this place, and before we trace the course of the war, the statements of Eusebius respecting the religious motives by which Constantine was sustained and actuated in this expedition. "While he regarded," says this writer, "the entire world as one immense body, and perceived that the head of it all, the royal city of the Roman empire, was bowed down by the weight of a tyrannous oppression; at first, he had left the task of liberation to those who governed the other divisions of the empire, as being his superiors in point of age. But when none of them proved able to afford relief, and those who had attempted it had experienced a disastrous termination of their enterprise, he said that life was without enjoyment to him so long as he saw the imperial city thus afflicted, and prepared himself for the effectual suppression of the tyranny.

"Being convinced, however, that he needed some more

powerful aid than his military forces could afford him, on account of the wicked and magical enchantments which were so diligently practised by the tyrant, he began to seek for divine assistance; deeming the possession of arms and a numerous soldiery of secondary importance, but trusting that the co-operation of a deity would be his security against defeat or misfortune. He considered, therefore, on what he might rely for protection and assistance. While engaged in this inquiry, the thought occurred to him, that, of the many emperors who had preceded him, those who had rested their hopes in a multitude of gods, and served them with sacrifices and offerings, had, in the first place, been deceived by flattering predictions, and oracles which promised them all prosperity, and at last had met with an unhappy end, while not one of their gods had stood by to warn them of the impending wrath of Heaven. On the other hand, he recollected that his father, who had pursued an entirely opposite course, who had condemned their error, and honoured the one Supreme God during his whole life, had found him to be the Saviour and Protector of his empire, and the Giver of every good thing. Reflecting on this, and well weighing the fact that they who had trusted in many gods had also fallen by manifold forms of death, without leaving behind them either family or offspring, stock, name, or memorial among men; and considering further, that those who had already taken arms against the tyrant, and had marched to the battle-field under the protection of a multitude of gods, had met with a dishonourable end; reviewing, I say, all these considerations, he judged it to be folly indeed to join in the idle worship of those who were no gods, and, after such convincing evidence, to wander from the truth; and therefore felt it incumbent on him to honour no other than the God of his father."*

Such are the statements of this historian in reference to the first beginnings of that course of piety which ultimately led to the establishment of the christian religion and the endowment and aggrandizement of its professors. It is

* Life of Constantine, book i. chaps. 26, 27.

necessary to introduce them here, in the very words of the original authority, that the reader may be enabled thus early to form an opinion respecting the character of that piety itself. It is scarcely necessary to attempt a serious criticism of this professed record of what passed in Constantine's mind. The age in which it was written was the age of "pious frauds," and it is in itself no mean specimen of the productions characterised by that phrase. Doubtless Eusebius deemed it a very laudable thing to assert the christian character of his patron and the head of the catholic church; neither did it matter much, when such important ends were to be attained if the means adopted to secure them were in some trifling respects alien from the truth. Unfortunately, however, for Eusebius, his representation has not been received as that of a disinterested party; neither does it cohere sufficiently to insure an unhesitating reception. Those who have any knowledge of christianity itself, can form no other conviction respecting the christianity of Constantine as set forth with all its antecedents in the page of the bishop of Cæsarea, than that it was a mere piece of policy—a stroke of worldly prudence, that rested the claims of the only true religion, not on its own character and evidences, but on the fortunes of families and the results of war. Indeed, it appears evident from this very testimony, that the emperor of the west knew nothing of the spirit and genius of the religion of Jesus; and that if he contended at the head of his troops as the champion of the Christians, it was because he deemed it expedient to do so, at a time when the oracles of paganism were against him, and the Christians were evidently rising to a position of moral power in the state.

But this was not all, if we may credit Eusebius, whose authority is chiefly relied on in reference to these matters. Not only did Constantine arrive at the conclusions already mentioned, in reference to the God of the Christians; but was rewarded by a miraculous manifestation, first, of the cross in the heavens, visibly displayed before the whole army; and afterwards of Christ himself, in a vision of the following night. Here, also, we adduce the narrative of

Eusebius, that the reader may judge for himself respecting the value that belongs to it:—"Accordingly, he called on Him with earnest prayer and supplications that he would reveal to him who he was, and stretch forth his right hand to help him in his present difficulties. And while he was thus praying with fervent entreaty, a most marvellous sign appeared to him from heaven, the account of which it might have been difficult to receive with credit, had it been related by any other person. But since the victorious emperor himself, long afterwards, declared it to the writer of this history, when he was honoured with his acquaintance and society, and confirmed his statement by an oath; who could hesitate to accredit the relation, especially since the testimony of after-time has established its truth? He said that about mid-day, when the sun was beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, 'Conquer by this!' At this sight, he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which happened to be following him on some expedition, and witnessed the miracle.

"He said, moreover, that he doubted within himself what the import of this apparition could be. And while he continued to ponder and reason on its meaning, night imperceptibly drew on; and, in his sleep, the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to procure a standard made in the likeness of that sign, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.

"At dawn of day he arose, and communicated the secret to his friends; and then, calling together the workers in gold and precious stones, he sat in the midst of them, and described to them the figure of the sign he had seen, bidding them represent it in gold and precious stones. And this representation I myself have had an opportunity of seeing.

"Now it was made in the following manner. A long spear, overlaid with gold, formed the figure of the cross, by means of a piece laid transversely over it. On the top of the whole was fixed a crown, formed by the intertexture of

gold and precious stones; and on this, two letters indicating the name of Christ, symbolized the Saviour's title by means of its first characters—the letter P being intersected by X exactly in its centre; and these letters the emperor was in the habit of wearing on his helmet at a later period. From the transverse piece which crossed the spear was suspended a kind of streamer of purple cloth, covered with a profuse embroidery of most brilliant precious stones; and which, being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder. This banner was of a square form; and the upright staff, which, in its full extent, was of great length, bore a golden half-length portrait of the pious emperor and his children on its upper part, beneath the trophy of the cross, and immediately above the embroidered streamer.

"The emperor constantly made use of this salutary sign as a safeguard against every adverse and hostile power, and commanded that others similar to it should be carried at the head of all his armies."*

Such is the testimony of Eusebius respecting this marvellous incident in the history of Constantine—testimony that has been received by a large number of ecclesiastical writers as unimpeachable. It were an idle thing to attempt a serious refutation of the lying wonder. The character of the age and of the church in which the story originated—the party spirit, the credulity, and, we must add, the vanity of the narrator, who never loses an opportunity of magnifying the confidence reposed in him by the emperor—the absence of all specific reference to the time and place in which the miracle appeared—the total want of contemporaneous testimony, although the vision might have been attested by thousands, if, indeed, it occurred according to the representation—and the inconsistency of the whole with the spirit and genius of christianity—are sufficient to condemn the entire narrative as a fraudulent invention. Which of the two—Constantine or Eusebius—was the author of the pious fiction, we are not anxious to determine. If the former, the fact is enough to throw discredit upon the sincerity of his

* Life of Constantine, book i. chaps. 28—31.

christian profession; and if the latter, the circumstance is only one out of a number, that serve to prove the unscrupulousness of the methods he adopted to promote the interests of an ecclesiastical party.*

It may here be mentioned, that Lactantius, who wrote his account of the war against Maxentius many years before Eusebius, and who was equally devoted to Constantine, makes no mention of the appearance of the cross, much less of Christ in person; but simply states that, being admonished during his sleep to make the celestial sign of God on his shields, and so to commit himself to the battle, Constantine did as he was commanded.† John Malela, also, a writer of the sixth century, but who mentions another writer of the previous century as his authority for many of his statements, refers to the event as occurring in a dream: —"Being overcome by sleep, he saw in a dream a cross in the heavens, in which was written, 'By this conquer.'"‡

It is not very difficult to account for the origin of this marvellous tale, on the supposition, which seems warranted by facts, that Constantine had about this time determined to make a more public avowal of his attachment to the christian party.§ Nor is there anything wonderful in the circumstance, that, when his mind was considerably engrossed with the subject, he should dream of conquest in connexion with so important a change of policy. Whether the standard of the cross was borne before the army during the whole of the civil war in Italy, or whether it was

* See Gibbon's account of the miracle, which might have been more brief and satisfactory, if he had distinguished between christianity and its professors, especially of the catholic church (Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 20). Waddington rejects the story, but endeavours to save the credit of both Constantine and Eusebius (Hist. of the Church, &c., chap. 6).

† De Mort. Persecut. 44.

‡ Gibbon, and all other writers, have overlooked this passage in Malela. Nestorianus, an historian who had written lives of the emperors, which are now lost, is the authority referred to by Malela.

§ See a long disquisition on this fertile subject, in Manso's Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 80—87.

devised as an expedient during the last engagement near Rome, is uncertain.* It does appear probable that, somewhere about this time, Constantine employed some such symbol, as the ensign of war, and attached considerable importance to it. "The christian emperors," says Gibbon, "who respected the example of Constantine, displayed in all their military expeditions the standard of the cross; but when the degenerate successors of Theodosius had ceased to appear in person at the head of their armies, the labarum was deposited, as a venerable but useless relic, in the palace of Constantinople. Its honours are still preserved on the medals of the Flavian family. Their grateful devotion has placed the monogram of Christ in the midst of the ensigns of Rome. The solemn epithets of, safety of the republic, glory of the army, restoration of public happiness, are equally applied to the religious and military trophies; and there is still extant a medal of the emperor Constantius, where the standard of the labarum is accompanied with these memorable words, BY THIS SIGN THOU SHALT CONQUER."†

But it is time that we turn from the consideration of ecclesiastical fables to the more substantial region of fact, by following the course of the legions of the west, in their invasion of the dominions of Maxentius.

* Lactantius mentions the last engagement as the time; neither does Eusebius contradict him, for he leaves the time undetermined.

† Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 20.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INVASION OF ITALY BY CONSTANTINE—HIS RECEPTION AND CONDUCT AT ROME AFTER THE DEATH OF MAXENTIUS—CHANGES EFFECTED UNDER HIS ADMINISTRATION—THE STATEMENTS OF EUSEBIUS RESPECTING HIS RELIGIOUS PROFESSION AT THIS PERIOD—THOSE STATEMENTS EXAMINED—THE PROBABLE AIMS OF CONSTANTINE—THE TWO EDICTS OF TOLERATION ISSUED BY CONSTANTINE AND LICINIUS—THEIR SPIRIT CHARACTERISED. A.D. 311—313.

So soon as Constantine had collected his army—which was done in a very brief time, and before Maxentius was aware of his purpose—he passed out of Gaul and entered Piedmont by the way of Mount Cenis. Segustum, or Susa—a city at the foot of Mount Cenis—was the first object of assault. Though well fortified and garrisoned, it was speedily captured, and a large number of its defenders destroyed by the sword. Proceeding to Turin—a distance of about forty miles—a more formidable resistance presented itself. Intelligence had been received of his approach, and a large body of cavalry, well accoutred and clad in steel armour, man and horse, was drawn up in battle array against him. The skilful movements* and irresistible charges of the Gallic horse soon divided and routed the troops of Maxentius, who fled in haste and fear to the city; but finding the gates closed against them, were confounded and easily slaughtered by their pursuers. By this decided victory, Turin, Milan, and all the cities of Italy between the Alps and the Po, surrendered to Constantine and espoused his side.† He

* Zosimus, i. 50.

† Paneg. viii. 6, 7; Nazarius, ix. 22—24.

next turned aside towards Verona, and passing the Adige with great difficulty, surrounded and besieged the city. Ruricus Pompeianus, the governor, a general of great ability, managed to effect his escape from the city, and collected a large army in Venetia for the purpose of attacking the troops of Constantine, and compelling him to raise the siege. The numbers of the Italians far exceeded those of the army of Gaul; but such was the skill and energy of the latter, that in a drawn battle they were victorious. The contest lasted from evening to morning. Thousands of the Italians were slain, their general amongst the number, and the rest either made prisoners or dispersed. The captives were so numerous that, in default of chains, the swords of the vanquished were converted into fetters. Having thus made sure of every post of importance in Italy, Constantine now directed his course towards Rome.

The forces of Maxentius were considerably reduced by the successes of his enemy; but a third and more numerous army than those already vanquished was collected for the defence of the imperial city.* Maxentius passed his time, during the events just narrated, in his customary state of self-indulgence and indolence. The tidings of Constantine's success, and afterwards of his approach, roused him in some degree from his lethargy, but only to be the subject of alternate fear and presumption. The murmurs and reproaches of the Roman people, at length, forced him from his misconceived position of security and abandonment. After consulting the Sibylline books, or rather the cunning priests of the pagan superstition, who gave him an oracular response on which little dependence could be placed,† he determined to take the field and share with his troops the dangers that threatened them. Constantine had now

* Eusebius mentions the first, second, and third divisions of the army of Maxentius. It is probable that he refers to the disposition of his forces in Italy, rather than to the ranks into which they were distributed. Susa, Turin, Verona, would be the places where these divisions were posted.

† That "in that day the enemy of the Roman people should perish."—De Mort. Persecut. 44.

arrived by forced marches at Saxa Rubra, about nine miles distant from Rome, and to his great joy perceived the army of Maxentius drawn up in battle array. He had feared lest the enemy might have rendered it necessary for him to lay siege to Rome—an enterprise fraught with difficulty and danger, and which, even if successful, would have been attended with results that he would have avoided. He was desirous, if possible, of sparing the inhabitants, whose disposition towards himself was rather favourable than otherwise, and of preserving their famous city in unmutilated glory. The legions of Gaul, flushed with victory, panted for the contest, and Constantine himself was no less anxious for the final struggle. The army of Maxentius, consisting of infantry and cavalry, the latter composed chiefly of unwieldy cuirassiers, occupied a vast plain, with the Tiber in its rear. The impetuosity of the Gallic horse broke the ranks of the Italians. The infantry lost all self-possession, and fled. The confusion became general. Great numbers were slain, and thousands rushing into the Tiber were carried away by the rapidity of the current and drowned. Maxentius himself was destroyed — according to some, while attempting to escape into the city by the Milvian bridge; according to others, through the breaking down of a wooden bridge erected by his directions for the purpose of snaring the enemy.* The day after the battle his body was found imbedded in the mud of the river. The head was stuck upon a spear and exhibited to the citizens of Rome, in proof of the completeness of the deliverance effected.† Thus perished a great tyrant, on the anniversary of the day on which six years before he had usurped the throne of Italy; and thus the largest portion of the empire came into the hands of the victorious Constantine.

The new emperor was received by the citizens amidst general acclamations. The two sons of Maxentius, and several of his principal adherents, were put to death. At the same time the cry of the populace, who thought to

* Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 38.

† Paneg. viii. 18. It is also stated that the head of Maxentius was sent to Africa. Nazarius, ix. 52.

please their conqueror by such means, for additional victims, was firmly resisted by Constantine, who had determined to use his triumph with moderation. Not only were informers discouraged, but many who had been unjustly imprisoned were liberated, and a large number who had been banished by Maxentius were recalled to the enjoyment of their liberty and their possessions. By a general act of oblivion every fear was hushed, and Italy and Africa followed the example of Rome in giving a cordial welcome to their new ruler.* As soon as public order was restored, Constantine recapitulated his services before the senate, and assuring them of his regard, perpetuated their privileges and dignity. In return for the favour thus shown, they bestowed upon him a profusion of titles, and passed a decree assigning him the first rank among the three Augusti who now ruled over the empire. Public rejoicings were instituted, and monuments were erected in commemoration of his victory. The Arch of Constantine still remains to attest the fact of his conquest and the decline of Roman art. "As it was not possible," says Gibbon, "to find in the capital of the empire a sculptor who was capable of adorning that public monument, the Arch of Trajan, without any respect either for his memory or for the rules of propriety, was stripped of its most elegant figures. The difference of times and persons, of actions and characters, was totally disregarded. The Parthian captives appear prostrate at the feet of a prince who never carried his arms across the Euphrates; and curious antiquarians can still discover the head of Trajan on the trophies of Constantine. The new ornaments which it was necessary to introduce between the vacancies of ancient sculpture, are executed in the rudest and most unskilful manner."† The inscription on this arch was in all probability suggested, if not dictated, by Constantine himself. It attributes the victory to "an instinct of divinity," as well as "greatness of mind."‡ It

* Eusebius gives a very lively and enthusiastic account of Constantine's reception.

† Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 14.

‡ The inscription, as given in full in Carl Zell's Handbuch der

may be that the former phrase was a compromise between the christian advisers or agents of Constantine and the pagan senate. However regarded, it seems to favour the opinion that the emperor wished his triumph to be considered as in some way the result of divine favour.

Great changes were now effected at Rome. The prætorian guards who survived the late battle were distributed amongst the legions of Gaul, and their order abolished. The senate and citizens were thus left without their nominal protectors —for they had been little more during the reign of Maxentius—and were now completely in the power of their new master. A body of troops in whom he could confide, and sufficiently numerous to overawe the city, was stationed in the capital. He was thus at liberty to attend to other portions of his vast dominions, without fear of insurrection or reaction; and, in fact, after the first two or three months, ceased to reside at Rome altogether. Various motives of policy induced him to take this course, and only twice during his subsequent life did he even visit the city. He compelled the Romans, however, and especially those of the senatorial order, to pay a large proportion for the support of his government. The free gift exacted by Maxentius was converted into a tax, levied according to the supposed wealth of the various classes into which the order was divided. In this respect, the administration of Constantine would appear to be more oppressive than that of his predecessor. But it should be borne in mind, that, besides exacting the same or even a larger amount in the name of a free gift, Maxentius plundered and confiscated whenever and wherever he thought proper, and on the slightest pretext; so that no man was secure from his rapacity. A great change was also effected in the administration of

Römischen Epigraphik, Heidelberg, 1850, is as follows:—"Imp. Cæs. Fl. Constantino Maximo P. F. (*a*) Augusto S.P.Q.R. (*b*) quod instinctu divinitatis mentis magnitudine cum exercitu suo tam de tyranno quam de omni ejus factione uno tempore justis rempublicam ultus est armis arcum triumphis insignem dicavit."

(*a*) Pio felice. (*b*) Senatus populusque Romanus.

justice. The laws were respected, the rights of citizens observed, and public security took the place of perpetual apprehension and fear. Even the senators had little to complain of when they remembered how blind Justice had been, in the days of Maxentius, to everything but his interests, while the sword of the prætorians always preponderated in her balance.

If we may credit Eusebius, Constantine began, even at this early period, to avow himself a believer in the religion of Jesus, and to give his highest sanction and favour to all who professed the christian faith. He represents the emperor as giving thanks to God for his victory over Maxentius, in the very spirit and language of Moses and Miriam when Pharaoh and his host were destroyed in the Red Sea. He mentions how, by monumental inscriptions and other means, he ascribed his success to the "salutary symbol" of the cross; and instances, in particular, the erection of a statue of Constantine himself, holding in its hand "a lofty spear in the figure of a cross," with the following inscription engraved on it in the Latin language:—"By virtue of this salutary sign, which is the true symbol of valour, I have preserved and liberated your city from the yoke of tyranny, I have also set at liberty the Roman senate and people, and restored them to their ancient greatness and splendour."*

But this was not all. According to the same writer, "the emperor was accustomed personally to invite the society of God's ministers, whom he distinguished with the highest respect and honour, treating them in every sense as persons consecrated to the service of his God. They were admitted to his table, though mean in their attire and outward appearance; yet not so in his estimation, since he judged not of their exterior as seen by the vulgar eye, but thought he discerned in them somewhat of the character of God himself. He made them also his companions in travel, believing that He whose servants they were would thus be more favourably inclined to himself. Besides this, he gave from his own private resources costly benefactions to the

* This is mentioned by Eusebius in the Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 40; and in the Eccl. Hist., book. ix. chap. 9.

churches of God, both enlarging and heightening the sacred edifices, and embellishing the august sanctuaries of the church with abundant offerings."* Yet further; after a eulogistic account of his liberality to the poor, he proceeds: —"Such was his general conduct towards all. But he exercised a peculiar care over the church of God; and whereas, in the several provinces there were some who differed from each other in judgment, he assumed as it were the functions of a general bishop constituted by God, and convened synods of his ministers. Nor did he disdain to be present and sit with them in their assembly, but bore a share in their deliberations, endeavouring to minister to them all what pertained to the peace of God. He took his seat, too, in the midst of them, as an individual amongst many, dismissing his guards and soldiers, and all whose duty it was to defend his person; feeling himself sufficiently protected by the fear of God, and secure in the affection of his most faithful christian friends. Those whom he saw inclined to a sound judgment, and exhibiting a calm and conciliatory temper, received his highest approbation, for he evidently delighted in a general harmony of sentiment; while he regarded the refractory and obstinate with aversion."†

If this testimony be true, either wholly or only in part, Constantine must have commenced his reign, as the sovereign of Italy, in a different manner from what is generally represented to have been the case. The extracts we have given describe a state of things entirely novel to the senate and people of Rome, and one for which the Christians were hardly prepared at this time. Nothing is said respecting the priests of the ancient pagan religion, and the feelings with which they regarded the acts of their new ruler. Is it to be supposed that they and the multitude of the people with them submitted without a murmur to so terrible a reverse? Or has Eusebius told us only one-half of the truth, omitting to mention the fact that in this transitionary period of his policy, if not of his faith, he gave his public

* Life of Constantine, book i. chap. 42.

† Ibid. chap. 44.

sanction to all the customary rites of paganism, while in a more private manner he favoured the ministers and professors of christianity? We are inclined, on the whole, to think that the historian has somewhat ante-dated the zeal of the emperor in behalf of the Christians. The public monuments and inscriptions, so far as we are acquainted with them, would both appear and read very differently to the uninitiated populace, from what they would to Eusebius many years afterwards. A spear in the form of a cross, and the phrase "salutary symbol," might suffice to recall to the bishop of Cæsarea the entire doctrine of the gospel as afterwards professed by Constantine, and might be interpreted by him as a "proclamation of the Son of God to the Romans;" but to the Romans themselves the former might seem nothing more than an instrument of warfare, and the latter, in connexion with it, nothing more than the expression of a fact that by such weapons Constantine had obtained the victory. If Constantine had really been desirous of avowing his faith in Christ he might have adopted a more lucid method of delivering his testimony. The probability is, that at this period he acted so as to save his credit with both parties.

The last of the preceding extracts appears to be yet further from the truth, if understood as relating to the period when Constantine resided at Rome. That he favoured and protected the Christians in Gaul long before this, we know, and that at a time when he liberally contributed to the support of the established religion, by restoring and enriching its temples, and presenting votive offerings on its altars. Even then he admitted Christians to his court, as his father had done before him. It is possible, therefore, that now, when he was evidently bent upon extending his favour to the Christians, if not of changing his religious policy altogether, he should admit a few select ministers to his table, for the purpose of surprising them by his condescension; and for the further purpose of ascertaining how far the christian party were willing to espouse his cause and submit to his imperial will. But we can scarcely conceive it possible that before the edict of toleration he should take so decisive a

part in the affairs of the Christians, as to convene synods of the clergy and adjudicate between disputants, much less assume "the functions of a general bishop constituted by God." Lactantius, who was probably admitted to the favour of Constantine before this time, makes no mention of the fact under this date;* neither does Eusebius himself, in his Ecclesiastical History—a work much more to be relied on than the Life of Constantine, in this and several other particulars.†

We have dwelt the more fully upon this subject, because it is important to ascertain, if possible, the steps by which Constantine was led to espouse the christian cause. It appears highly probable, if not certain, that, up to the time immediately preceding the expedition into Italy, he gave his sanction to the established paganism of the day. His father was honoured by a solemn apotheosis, and admitted to the council of Olympus; medals were issued by his authority bearing the figures and attributes of the heathen deities; and, within a few months of the Italian war, one of the panegyrists delivered an oration in his hearing, replete with the absurdities of superstition, and affording particular evidence of Constantine's veneration for Apollo.‡ The language of Gibbon, on this point, is not too strong:—"The credulous multitude were taught to believe that the emperor was permitted to behold with mortal eyes the visible majesty of their tutelar deity; and that, either waking or in a vision, he was blessed with the auspicious omens of a long and

* We refer to the work, De Mortibus Persecutorum. Doubts have been raised as to whether or no Lactantius was its author. The preponderating evidence, however, is in his favour. (See the Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography, &c.) But whether Lactantius or another was the author, the omission referred to in the text is an argument against the admission of the statement of Eusebius.

† The Ecclesiastical History was composed before, and the Life of Constantine some time after, the death of Constantine, when the incidents of the several periods of his life might become confounded together, and, in some instances, magnified.

‡ Paneg. vii.

victorious reign. The sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine; and the pagans might reasonably expect that the insulted god would pursue with unrelenting vengeance the impiety of his ungrateful favourite."* That Constantine became a Christian, really and truly, either just before or during the time of the Italian war, is more than can be proved: indeed, we shall be under the necessity of recording facts in relation to his principles, spirit, and conduct, in some of the later periods of his life, that render it questionable whether he were ever a sincere convert or no; neither does anything more clearly prove that such was not the case at the period now under consideration than the circumstances narrated by Eusebius. While, however, we altogether reject the eulogistic records of ecclesiastical partisans, there is abundant evidence that, somewhere about this time, he saw reason to ally himself more closely to the Christians than he had previously done, and began to feel his way towards that relation which, however anomalous, he afterwards sustained in connexion with the catholic church.

It would appear that, immediately after the conquest of Italy, Constantine granted full toleration to all religions whatsoever; and, a few months later, issued an edict in conjunction with Licinius confirming the indulgence, but with special provisions on behalf of the Christians. The first of these edicts has not been preserved; but there is reference to it in the latter which leaves it beyond question that it was published.† The one that has been preserved in the

* Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 20. See also Manso, Leben Constantins des Grossen, p. 80.

† Gibbon makes no reference to the first edict. Mosheim mentions it briefly in his Ecclesiastical History, cent. iv. part i. chap. 1, § 6. Manso places it in the year 312, and refers the edict recorded by Eusebius and Lactantius to June 13, 313. He is also supported by the text of Lactantius in ascribing it to Nicomedia rather than Milan. (See De Mort. Persecut. 48. Manso, Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 92—94, 361.) Eusebius states that he translated the edict from the Latin. His translation, however, differs considerably from the original, as given by Lactantius, and contains a preface that is omitted by the latter.

pages of Eusebius and Lactantius was issued at Milan, or Nicomedia, or both, in the year 313. It is as follows:—

"As we long since perceived that religious liberty should not be denied, but that it should be granted to the opinions and wishes of each one to perform divine duties according to his own determination, we had given orders, that each one, and the Christians among the rest, have the liberty to observe the religion of his choice, and his peculiar mode of worship. But as there plainly appeared to be many and different sects added in that edict, in which this privilege was granted them, some of them, perhaps, after a little while, on this account shrunk from this kind of attention and observance. Wherefore, as I, Constantine Augustus, and I, Licinius Augustus, came under favourable auspices to Milan, and took under consideration all affairs that pertained to the public benefit and welfare, these things among the rest appeared to us to be most advantageous and profitable to all. We have resolved among the first things to ordain those matters by which reverence and worship to the Deity might be exhibited; that is, how we may grant likewise to the Christians and to all, the free choice to follow that mode of worship which they may wish, that whatsoever divinity and celestial power may exist, may be propitious to us and to all that live under our government. Therefore, we have decreed the following ordinance, as our will, with a salutary and most correct intention, that no freedom at all shall be refused to Christians to follow or to keep their observances or worship; but that to each one power be granted to devote his mind to that worship which he may think adapted to himself, that the Deity may in all things exhibit to us his accustomed favour and kindness. It was just and consistent that we should write that this was our pleasure, that all exceptions respecting the Christians being completely removed, which were contained in the former epistle, that we sent to your fidelity, and whatever measures were wholly sinister and foreign to our mildness, that these should be altogether annulled; and now that each one of the Christians may freely, and without molestation, pursue and follow that course of worship which he has proposed to himself: which indeed we have resolved

to communicate most fully to your care and diligence, that you may know we have granted liberty and full freedom to the Christians, to observe their own mode of worship; which as your fidelity understands absolutely granted to them by us, the privilege is also granted to others to pursue that worship and religion they wish, which it is obvious is consistent with the peace and tranquillity of our times; that each may have the privilege to select and to worship whatsoever divinity he pleases. But this has been done by us, that we might not appear in any manner to detract anything from any manner of religion, or any mode of worship. And this we further decree, with respect to the Christians, that the places in which they were formerly accustomed to assemble, concerning which we also formerly wrote to your fidelity, in a different form, that if any persons have purchased these, either from our treasury or any other one, these shall restore them to the Christians, without money, and without demanding any price, without any superadded value or augmentation, without delay or hesitancy. And if any have happened to receive these places as presents, that they shall restore them as soon as possible to the Christians, so that if either those that purchased or those that received them as presents, have anything to request of our munificence, they may go to the provincial governor, as the judge, that provision may also be made for them by our clemency; all which, it will be necessary to be delivered up to the body of Christians, by your care, without any delay. And since the Christians themselves are known to have had not only those places where they were accustomed to meet, but other places also, belonging not to individuals among them, but to the right of the whole body of Christians, you will also command all these, by virtue of the law before mentioned, without any hesitancy, to be restored to these same Christians, that is to their body, and to each conventicle respectively; the aforesaid consideration to wit being observed; namely, that they who as we have said restore them without valuation and price, may expect their indemnity from our munificence and liberality. In all which it will be incumbent on you to exhibit your exertions as

much as possible, to the aforesaid body of Christians, that our orders may be most speedily accomplished, that likewise in this, provision may be made by our clemency for the preservation of the common and public tranquillity. For by these means, as before said, the divine favour with regard to us, which we have already experienced in many affairs, will continue firm and permanent at all times. But that the purpose of this our ordinance and liberality may be extended to the knowledge of all, it is expected that these things written by us, should be proposed and published to the knowledge of all, that this act of our liberality and kindness may remain unknown to none."*

Such is the celebrated edict of toleration, known in ecclesiastical history as the Edict of Milan. The reference in the prefatory sentences, which are omitted in the record of Lactantius, is involved in much obscurity; it seems, however, to imply that the original grant of toleration had embraced a greater number than it was now thought desirable to recognise. "Many and different sects" are mentioned, as having the privilege granted to them of following their own religious convictions; and it is asserted that on this account "some of them shrunk from this kind of attention and notice." Although the body of the edict itself holds out liberty to all—"that each one of the Christians may freely and without molestation pursue and follow that course of worship which he has proposed to himself"—we are unable to escape the conviction, that the reference was to the catholic church, as distinguished from the sects and particular congregations of Christians who did not recognise the authority of the body so designating itself.

But as we have now arrived at a period in the life of Constantine, in which it is necessary to have correct views of the condition of those whom he was beginning to patronize, we shall, in a separate chapter, state, as concisely as possible, the ecclesiastical position of the Christians up to this time.

* Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. (Bagster), book x. chap. 5.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STATE OF CHRISTIANITY AND OF THE CHURCHES AT THE CLOSE OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE—THE GRADUAL DECLINE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN SPIRIT—THE ORIGIN AND INFLUENCE OF THE IDEA OF A VISIBLE CATHOLIC CHURCH—THE RISE OF SYNODICAL ASSEMBLIES AND THEIR RESULTS—THE FIRST BEGINNINGS AND GROWTH OF THE HIERARCHY—COLLATERAL INNOVATIONS—THE CHANGE EFFECTED IN THE CHARACTER, FUNCTIONS, AND SERVICES OF THE CLERGY—THE CONDITION OF THE CATHOLIC PARTY AT THIS TIME.

WHEN the apostles had fulfilled their commission as the inspired teachers and rulers of the church, the entire body of the faithful scattered throughout the world were thenceforth left to the instructions they had given, and the institutions they had set up, as their only guide. It might have pleased the great Head of the church to retain their services, or the services of men similarly qualified, by whom the churches might have been ordered and superintended from age to age. But it did not. Having authoritatively communicated his will in the beginning of the church's history, by the living voice and personal ministrations of the apostles, and by inspired writings that were to hand down to distant periods the substance of all that had been divinely taught, it seemed good to him to withdraw this extraordinary agency. The word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ remained as the only infallible guide in all matters pertaining to religious doctrine and worship. Henceforth it became the duty of christian men to "seek out the word of the Lord," and to follow its instructions. The foundation on which Christians and christian churches were exclusively to build was that which had been so

clearly defined—"the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Now that inspired authority in the persons of living men had been withdrawn, no human authority was to take its place. The churches, or congregations of christian worshippers, were established on a basis suited to the genius of the new era. The members composing them were avowed and recognised disciples of Christ; they were united on a common footing of consentaneous, though independent, faith and practice; no man was called or regarded as "Lord;" one was their Master, even Christ, and all were satisfied with occupying the place of "brethren." The officers of the churches were their "servants for Christ's sake," chosen by each community as their service might be needed. Humility, experience, purity of life, spiritual gifts, were the only qualifications for office. The spiritual oversight and rule was committed to one class of men, called elders or bishops; and the secular management of a church's affairs were entrusted, for executive purposes, to another class of men called deacons. The members of a church in their collective capacity had the supreme power under Christ, and each member was at liberty to use his gifts for the edification of the rest, or for the benefit of men generally.

Such was the condition of the churches in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles. Nothing had occurred to subvert the primitive freedom. In respect to doctrine there might be heresies, as was the case during a great portion of the apostolic age; but in respect to organization there was no deviation from the primitive custom. Here and there individuals, departing from the spirit of the gospel, might strive for the pre-eminence, and churches might yield too much to individual or party influence; but there was no radical change. All parties were too much interested in their own spiritual immunities to submit to their invasion all at once. Liberty and right could not be undermined and destroyed in a day. Hierarchical pretensions had not yet budded. The two orders had not yet been multiplied. Synods and councils were as yet unheard-of things. Catholicity did not as yet extend itself beyond

the sphere of the spiritual and invisible. The churches enjoyed "a sisterly system of equality," and recognised no authority but Christ's, no unity but that which arose from identical faith and practice, spontaneous and unforced.*

This state of things continued for some time. No actual change of any importance took place until towards the middle and end of the second century. Then there occurred what the apostle has designated "a falling away." The spirit of formality began to take the place of faith and love. Professed Christians came to yield more than in former periods to authority in matters of religion. The free and independent spirit of the early churches, who recognised no laws but those of Christ and his apostles, perceptibly declined; and as the divine and spiritual diminished, the human and the formal encroached. As heretical opinions prevailed, men of influence began to form parties, the practical result of which was exhibited in a gradual invasion of the rights of conscience and the liberty of private judgment. Step by step the evil advanced, shaping itself forth more and more visibly at every stage, until, in the end, the original institutions of christianity were supplanted by the inventions of men.

The germ of that multiplicity of errors and evils which gradually arose in connexion with the profession of christianity, is to be found in the idea, already adverted to, of a visible catholic church—an idea which, springing up in an early period of the second century,† had practically developed itself, to a considerable extent, before the age of Constantine. It is thus characterised by Neander, who has

* On this subject all, or nearly all, our ecclesiastical historians are agreed. See Mosheim, De Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum Magnum; Neander's Hist. of the Christian Religion (Rose); Gieseler's Eccles. Hist. (Davidson), vol. i. pp. 92, 93, 108, 109; Coleman's Antiquities, chaps. 2, 3; Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 15.

† The term "catholic church" first appears in one of the epistles of Ignatius (ad Smyrn. c. 8); but is probably the interpolation of a later period. It next appears in the epistle of the church at Smyrna respecting the martyrdom of Polycarp, cap. 8, 16, 19.

given a more philosophical account of its origin and influence than any other writer:—"This great whole of the catholic church, which in all its scattered parts was still firmly united, and which in its origin, its development, and its constitution, was utterly different from all mere human institutions. The consciousness of being a member of such a body, victorious over every opposition of earthly power, and destined for eternity, must have been more lively and more powerful in those who, having, in their earlier years of heathenism, known no bonds of union except those of a political and secular nature, had been blessed, with no feelings of such a moral and spiritual bond of unity, which bound mankind together, as all members of the same heavenly community. Therefore must this feeling have been stronger and more lofty, when all the powers from without sought in vain to tear this bond in sunder. Justly might this unity, which revealed itself outwardly, this close bond of outward connexion, be of great importance to Christians, as the symbol of that higher life, by the participation in which all Christians were to be united together, as the revelation of the unity of the kingdom of God. In the outward communion of the church they perceived the blessing of the inward communion of the invisible kingdom of God, and they struggled for the maintenance of that unity, partly against idealistic sects, who threatened to tear in sunder the inward bond of religious communion, the bond of faith, and partly against those who, blinded by self-will or passion, founded divisions on mere outward causes, while they agreed in faith with the rest.

"But this polemical spirit, though it proceeded from a lively christian feeling, which deeply felt the blessing of religious communion—this inward life in the church, though it proceeded from a truly christian source of warmth—was apt to seduce men into the opposite extreme of over-prizing the external unity of the church, and of over-prizing the existing forms in the church, with which that unity was combined. As men in the churchly life, as long as it proceeded from inward feelings of christianity, and was still animated and penetrated by them, and ere it had been

benumbed in dead forms, became conscious of this intimate connexion between the visible and the invisible church; as men, in the communion of this visible church, felt deeply the blessing of communion with the Redeemer and with the whole body of saints, which receives its divine living powers from him, its head, and spreads them among its individual members; it was more likely on that account, in this polemical contrast, that they should be led away, so as too closely to interweave in idea also, that which had been thus joined and melted together in the experience and the feelings of every one, and also to lay it down in theory, that it was bound together in a necessary and indissoluble union. And thus, then, arose the confusion between the visible and the invisible church, the confusion of the inward union of the invisible church, a union of spirit which consists in faith and love, with the outward unity of the visible church, which is dependent on certain and outward forms. As these forms of the church were the instruments through which, by means of the feelings engendered on these forms, men had received the blessing of communion with the invisible Head of the church, they were more easily induced too closely to join together form and essentials, the vessel of clay and the inestimable heavenly treasure, to attribute too much to the earthly form, and to consider a subjective union, in the life and hearts of individuals, as an objective and necessary one. This principle would form itself in the following mode. The external church, which exists in this visible outward form, is, with all these outward forms, a divine institution; we cannot make a distinction here between human and divine; under this form has the church received divine things from Christ, and only under this form does she communicate them, and he alone can receive them, who *receives* them from her in this *outward* form. The invisible church, the kingdom of God, is represented in this outward form; and inward communion with that invisible church, as well as the participation of all her advantages, is necessarily connected with outward communion with this external church, which exists in these forms.

" The confusion between the views of the Old and those

of the New Testament on the theocracy, which we remarked above in the notions of the priesthood, also made its appearance again here. As in the Old Testament, the establishment and the extension of the theocracy was necessarily connected with many outward earthly things, which were only shadows and figures of that which was to appear in all its reality in christianity, men would have it, that the theocracy of the New Testament must also depend for its establishment and propagation on similar visible and earthly things; as the theocracy of the Old Testament was necessarily joined with a definite outward and visible priesthood, so, also, they would have it, that that of the New Testament was also necessarily joined with an outward priesthood of the same sort, divinely founded also. Men forgot that the difference between the church of Christ and the theocracy in the Old Testament, did not merely consist in the difference of outward signs and forms; but that there was a far more important distinction in the relation of the outward to the inward, of earthly things to heavenly and spiritual things. This is a most essential error, and has been the source of many other errors, with consequences of practical importance, which afterwards gradually unfolded themselves.

"We find this confusion between the conception of the invisible and the visible church, and the doctrine which was deduced from it, of an *outward* church which could alone confer salvation, and hence of a necessary *outward* unity of that church, first and most decidedly pronounced and carried through most logically, in the remarkable book on the unity of the church (De Unitate Ecclesiæ) which Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, wrote after the middle of the third century, in the midst of the divisions with which he had to contend. This book contains a striking mixture of falsehood and truth. If we understand what Cyprian says as referring to the communion of a higher life, to the necessary inward union with the one divine source of life in Christ, from which alone true life can flow forth on all the members of the communion of saints, and to the necessary communion between this body and their head,

through the direction of the heart in faith and feelings:—if we introduce into the conclusions of Cyprian, the difference between a visible and an invisible church, between the inward unity of the kingdom of God, and the outward unity of a visible church; between an inward communion with the church of the redeemed, and an outward connexion with a certain outward form, under which that church, whose foundations are in the inward heart, in faith and in love, appears;—then, indeed, we shall find much truth in what he says against a proud and self-seeking spirit, which struggles to get free from its connexion with the one kingdom of God, whose head, foundation, and centre-point, is Christ, and is anxious to set itself up as something independent.

"'Only endeavour,' says Cyprian, 'to free the sunbeam from the sun! the unity of light will not be broken. Break the branch from the tree, and it can bear no fruit! Dissever the stream from the source, and it dries up! Thus also the church, beamed upon by the light of the Lord, extends its beams over all the world, but it is still only one light, which spreads itself into all directions; from the bosom of that church are we all born, nourished by her milk, and animated by her spirit. That which is torn asunder from the original stem, can neither breathe, nor live separate and independent.' This is certainly all just enough, if we understand by that original whole, in connexion with which alone each individual can thrive, the invisible church of the redeemed under their invisible head, Christ; if we attribute that unity only to spiritual communion, and that separation only to a separation in heart; but the fundamental error, by which everything which is really true in itself received a false application, was the transference of these notions from all this to an external church, appearing under distinct outward forms, and necessarily dependent on them; a church, which had maintained itself from the time of the apostles, under its existing constitution, by means of the bishops, its pillars, the successors of the apostles, and the heirs of the power, which had been delivered to the apostles. Christ, according to this view, had imparted to

the apostles, and the apostles, by ordination, had imparted to the bishops, the power of the Holy Ghost; by means of this external transmission, the power of the Holy Ghost, by which alone all religious acts can receive their true efficiency, was shed abroad and preserved to all times through the succession of bishops. Thus by this living and constantly progressing organization of the church, was maintained that divine life, which is imparted by this intermediate step from the Head to all the members that remain in union with this organization; and he who cuts himself off from outward communion with this outward organization, shuts himself out from that divine life and from the way to salvation. No one can, as an isolated individual, by faith in the Redeemer, receive a share in the divine life, which proceeds from him; no one can, by this faith alone, secure for himself all the advantages of the kingdom of God, but to all this man can alone attain by the instrumentality of the catholic church, which has been preserved by the succession of bishops."*

Such is the account this able historian gives of the dogma that was so prolific of evil to christianity and its professors. He adds, a little farther on, "As a false principle, by means of the deductions which develop themselves from it, is the source of many errors, so the error of a necessary visible unity of the church led to the erroneous idea of a necessary outward representation of this unity. This notion, in its first germ apparently very indistinct, and of little signification, became, as it was further unfolded, full of important consequences."†

As, on the one hand, the idea of a visible catholic church could never have been promulgated where men had not in some measure loosed their hold on primitive christian truth relating to individual responsibility; so, on the other, as it grew more definite, and passed from theory into practice, it sapped the foundations of religious liberty, and led to many disastrous results. Unscriptural,

* Neander's Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. pp. 214—218.

† Ibid. p. 220.

however, and pernicious as this idea was, it advanced with great rapidity, and became a nucleus of corruption. Some good men, and it may be with sincerity of a certain kind, lent their aid in giving it practical confirmation. Strong delusions reigned where before a simple faith and practice had prevailed. No power arose sufficient to arrest the downward progress of the christian party in respect to all that was spiritual and vital in religion. Here and there a feeble voice was raised against the innovations of the day; but in vain. As heresy, real or supposed, arose and became formidable in the opinion of the church's instructors, this dogma of catholicity came into use as a convenient substitute for argument. Irenæus and Tertullian* were the first to develop it with this avowed object,† and found it, probably, more successful than they had expected. The ministers of the churches gladly availed themselves of a method of silencing heretics, so simple, so practicable, and so admirably fitted to increase their official importance; and at length Cyprian,‡ boldly announcing and applying it in the systematic treatise referred to by Neander, led the way to its practical realization in all the movements of the catholic church. Then, to quote the words of Gieseler, "the idea strove to give itself an outward expression in the unity of everything belonging to the church. While religious faith was made interchangeable with the intelligent expression of it in doctrine, men began also to consider the unity of the latter as necessary to the unity of the church, and to limit freedom of inquiry more and more."

In connexion with this dogma of catholicity, and partly as the result of it, innovations of an ecclesiastical nature arose amongst the Christians. We refer particularly to the practice of convening synodical assemblies, and to the

* Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, died somewhere about the close of the second century. His work against heresies was probably written between A.D. 177 and 192. Tertullian is thought to have died at Carthage, A.D. 245, out of the pale of the catholic church—a heretic, although his principal writings were against heresy.

† Irenæus, iii. 3. Tertullian, De Præscr. Hær. c. 21.

‡ Cyprian, De Unitate Ecclesiæ. He was beheaded A.D. 258.

introduction of the system of diocesan episcopacy. The testimony of the most impartial and faithful ecclesiastical writers is uniform respecting the first of these points. "During a greater part of the second century," says Mosheim, "the christian churches were independent of each other; nor were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. Each christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or, at least, approved by the society. But, in process of time, all the christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole. This institution had its origin among the Greeks, with whom nothing was more common than this confederacy of independent states, and the regular assemblies which met, in consequence thereof, at fixed times, and were composed of the deputies of each respective state. But these ecclesiastical associations were not long confined to the Greeks: their great utility was no sooner perceived than they became universal, and were formed in all places where the gospel had been planted. To these assemblies, in which the deputies or commissioners of several churches consulted together, the name of SYNODS was appropriated by the Greeks, and that of COUNCILS by the Latins; and the laws that were enacted in these general meetings were called CANONS, that is, RULES. These councils, of which we find not the smallest trace before the middle of this century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form, for by them the ancient privileges of the people were considerably diminished."*

Similar to this, only more explicit, is the testimony of Neander. "Christianity," he writes, "produced among its genuine professors, from the first, a lively catholic spirit, and thence also an inward and mutual as well as outward connexion. This connexion must, from the nature of human things, assume a definite form; and this form was modelled after the existing form of those social connexions

* Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. cent. ii. pt. ii. chap. 2.

among which christianity first made its appearance. A sisterly system of equality, in the relation of the churches to each other, would, independently of these particular circumstances, have best corresponded to the spirit of christianity, and might have been most advantageous to its free and undisturbed publication. But these circumstances soon introduced a system of subordination into the relation of the churches to each other, into which christianity might enter, just as into all other human institutions, which contain nothing that is sinful by its very nature; but this system afterwards obtaining too great sway, exercised a restraining and destructive influence on the development of christian doctrines and life."*

Again, a little further on, he writes:—"These provincial synods do not appear as a constant and regular institution, fixed to definite times, until the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century; and it was, in this case, a peculiarity of one country, where particular local causes may have introduced such an arrangement earlier than in other regions. This country was, in fact, exactly Greece, where, from the time of the Achaic league, the system of confederation had maintained itself; and as christianity is able to connect itself with all the peculiarities of a people, provided they contain nothing immoral, and entering into them, to take itself a peculiar form resembling them, so, also, it might easily happen, that here the civil federal spirit, which already existed, worked upon the ecclesiastical catholic spirit, and gave it earlier than in other regions a tolerably good form; so that out of the representative assemblies of the civil communities (the Amphictyonic councils) were formed the representative assemblies of the ecclesiastical communities (*i.e.* the provincial synods). As the Christians, in the consciousness that they are nothing, and can do nothing, without the Spirit from above, were accustomed to begin all important business with prayer; they prepared themselves here, also, for their general deliberations by common prayer, at the opening of their assemblies, to Him who has promised that he will enlighten

* Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. pp. 207, 208.

and guide by his Spirit those who believe in him, if they will give themselves up to him wholly, and that he will be amongst them, where they are gathered together in his name." *

"But this confidence, in itself just and salutary, took a false and destructive turn, when it was not constantly accompanied by the spirit of humility and self-watchfulness, with fear and trembling; when men were not constantly mindful of the important condition under which alone man could hope to share in the fulfilment of that promise, in that divine illumination and guidance—the condition, that they were really assembled in the name of Christ, in lively faith in him, and honest devotion to him, and prepared to sacrifice their own wills; and when people gave themselves up to the fancy, that such an assembly, whatever might be the hearts of those who were assembled, had inalienable claims to the illumination of the Holy Spirit; for then, in the confusion and the intermixture of human and divine, men were abandoned to every kind of self-delusion, and the formula, 'by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit' (*Spiritu Sancto suggerente*), might become a pretence and sanction for all the suggestions of man's own will."†

Such is the statement of these historians respecting the origin of synodical assemblies, or councils. It is probable, however, that at first they were little more than friendly christian meetings, held for the purpose of promoting brotherly love and unity amongst all the neighbouring churches of a province. Had they retained this character, little harm could have resulted. But this was not the case. No precautionary steps were taken; the power of associate authority rapidly grew; the churches were in the toils, almost before they were aware of it; and the views that were everywhere gaining ground respecting the necessity of a visible church-catholicity, confirmed the position assumed by those who chiefly promoted these ecclesiastical meetings. So long as things went on smoothly, there was

* Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. p. 212.
† Ibid. vol. i. pp. 213, 214.

apparent harmony and concert; but when differences of opinion arose, either the minority must yield, or the synod have only a nominal power to act in its representative character. Thenceforth only two courses remained open to any dissentient churches—blind submission, or schism. In point of fact, there were some that refused this submission, and that called in question the authority and right of the synods themselves, alleging their novelty as sufficient proof of their unscriptural character;* but, on the other hand, the greater number, even of dissentients, were prepared to submit, rather than disturb the general harmony.

These synods served to develop and confirm another important change, which from small beginnings resulted in a fully matured hierarchical system. In the early period of the church, two words—bishop and presbyter—were used interchangeably to designate the spiritual officers of the christian society. Bishops were presbyters, and presbyters were bishops. In the course of time a distinction was made which divided the spiritual officers into two classes. This distinction arose very gradually, and not, perhaps, with much uniformity of practice at first. It was expedient that at the meetings of the several churches one of the elders or bishops should preside. This presidency might be determined at the time of meeting, or might come round to all the ministers in turn, or might be given to him who was the most reverend for age, or most fitted for the position by experience. Whenever the post of presidency became permanent, from either of the last-mentioned causes, the party occupying it would necessarily be designated by some appropriate term. In Justin Martyr's time, as we learn from his writings, the term president (προεστως) was used; but soon after, the term bishop took its place, probably because it seemed more suitable to the individual who occupied the chief place amongst the elders. He

* "It appears that this regular institution met at first with opposition as an innovation, so that Tertullian felt himself called upon to stand up in its defence." (Neander's Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. p. 213.) But even Tertullian admits that the councils were held only in some places. (De Jejuniis, c. 13.)

would be designated "*the* bishop," by way of eminence, in the first instance, and in course of time the term bishop would be applied to him exclusively. In point of fact, "even to the end of the second century," as Neander has observed, *the* bishop is sometimes spoken of as distinct from the other bishops or presbyters, and sometimes as one of and one with them.* The provincial synod, already adverted to, confirmed the distinction thus made, and rendered it marked and permanent.

It is easy to imagine how, in any case where express provision is not made against it, the periodic association of numbers is apt to confer influence and authority upon a few who may occupy the post of presidents or leaders; in the present case, the very office held by the bishops as the representatives of entire societies, created for them a precedency over all other delegates, whether presbyters or private Christians, which courtesy would easily grant, and custom would confirm. Thus, in the course of time, the distance between a bishop and his fellow presbyters was widened, and that which at first was only nominal, came to be a very grave reality. Besides this, as the synods were admitted to have the power of determining matters of doctrine and discipline, it is apparent how the office that was at one time subordinate to the voice of the collective church, soon rose above it, and grew into a "lordship over God's heritage." The bishops now felt that they had an authority, derived from their relation to the synod, which they had never possessed before as presidents of isolated societies. The presbyters also, although subordinate to the bishop, were elevated above the people; and in most instances were willing to defer on the one hand, since they could claim precedence of office on the other.

Thus one false step was succeeded by another. The apparently trivial distinction between the presbyters or bishops and their president led to a distinction between the two originally synonymous names, "presbyters" and "bishops;" this distinction of names led to further change

* Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. p. 194; Gieseler's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 109.

in the idea of office, as designated by the two names; and synodical meetings, or councils, divide the bishops from the presbyters more widely, and both from the people. Yet further false notions creep in. Deacons come to be regarded as levites, presbyters as priests, and bishops as high priests; and, finally, acting on all these, and re-acted upon in turn, the idea of a visible catholic church cements the hierarchical structure, and seeks to realize itself in the actual organization of Christ's professing people.

But this was not all. In the latter part of the second century, a distinction was made between the clergy and laity.* Soon after this, the provincial synods came to be held regularly every spring and autumn, at least in many provinces.† In connexion with these periodical meetings, the town bishops gradually acquired greater importance as the organs by whom the country bishops communicated to the assembly a knowledge of the state of their churches. In many cases the country churches received their ministers on the appointment of the town bishop nearest to them; or, if they were permitted to choose their own ministers, it was on the understanding of a tacit subordination to the bishop and presbyters of the mother-church. In some instances, such churches were considered branches of the town church, and were in all things subject to the town bishop; a presbyter, or even a deacon, being appointed to take them under supervision. In the middle of the third century, there were probably as many as forty-six presbyters in the church at Rome, with Cornelius as bishop at their head; the churches in the neighbouring districts being subject to them. The sisterly system of equality was thus destroyed by what Neander terms "the first great church union between the churches of the city and of the country, which together formed one whole."‡

This new system extended itself. Rome became the ecclesiastical metropolis of a great part of Italy, with a metropolitan bishop at its head; Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, acquired a similar position; and, inas-

* Gieseler's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 179. † Ibid. p. 261.

‡ Hist. of the Christian Religion, &c., vol. i. p. 208.

much as they had been more nearly connected with the personal labours of the apostles and evangelists, precedence was given to them by the churches generally, which became more and more marked every year. They were called the mother churches, the seats of the apostles, and so forth. At length Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch—the largest diocesan churches—were regarded as the three general centres of influence and union, while the first looked forward to becoming in the end the ecclesiastical metropolis of the world.

As the natural result of these changes, the clergy augmented their powers, and became possessed of that independence which was once the boast of those for whom their office was instituted. In both the Greek and Latin churches, their orders were multiplied. Besides metropolitans, bishops, presbyters, and deacons, there were subdeacons, acolyths, exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers. The ministry became proud, ostentatious, formal. The simple worship of the primitive Christians was transformed into a thing of pomp and show. As the wealth of the clergy accumulated, splendid structures arose, especially towards the end of the third century, which vied with the temples of the heathen; and, at the same time, the worldly character of the church was evinced by internal decorations and vessels of gold and silver. The bishop ascended his throne, and the presbyters their chairs, while the people humbly stood or kneeled around. Baptism became an imposing ceremonial, and was thought to have a regenerating power when duly administered, either directly by successors of the apostles, or by those who acted under their direction and sanction. Confirmation became necessary, in order to the validity of baptism, when performed by inferior orders of the clergy, or others. The Lord's supper, once a simple and humble service of memorial, in remembrance of Christ, whose death it showed forth as the foundation-fact of christianity and the basis of every truly christian hope, was completely altered in its character, and converted into a sacrifice, which christian priests alone could consecrate and offer. Marriage was constituted a sacrament amongst

ordinary people, and virtually condemned when entered into by the clergy. And thus the entire aspect of christianity, as a living and embodied thing, was completely transformed.*

Such was the condition of the catholic church at the time when Constantine began to favour the christian party. It is not to be supposed, however, that there were no dissentients, who rejected the dogmas and refused to acknowledge the authority of that body. There were many. It remains for us to show how, in a gradual manner, the emperor became acquainted with this fact, and to what portion of the entire body of christian professors he devoted his influence.

* For particulars illustrative of the several items mentioned above, see Mosheim, Neander, and Gieseler, under the head of the second and third centuries. See also Hist. of Independency, vol. i. book ii. chaps. 2, 3, for many of the statements in this chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TOLERATION GRANTED BY THE EDICT OF MILAN NOT UNIVERSAL —THE DEATH OF DIOCLETIAN, AND AFTERWARDS OF MAXIMIN DAZA—THE POLICY OF LICINIUS AND CONSTANTINE CONTRASTED —THE CONSPIRACY AND DEATH OF BASSIANUS—LEADS TO WAR BETWEEN CONSTANTINE AND LICINIUS — TREATY OF PEACE — DOMESTIC EVENTS DURING THE PEACE OF THE EMPIRE—CHANGES IN THE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION OF CONSTANTINE—HIS INTERFERENCE IN ECCLESIASTICAL AFFAIRS—ESPECIALLY OF NORTH AFRICA—ITS DISASTROUS RESULTS—EDICTS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF SUNDAY AND OTHER RELIGIOUS OBJECTS—HIS CONCESSIONS TO THE PAGANS AT THE SAME TIME. A.D. 313—323.

ALTHOUGH the Edict of Milan seemed to promise liberty of conscience and worship to all—both pagans and Christians —and has generally been regarded in that light, it appears, on closer inspection, and more especially when considered in connexion with the actual circumstances of the christian party generally, to limit the toleration granted, although in a somewhat vague manner. The preface to the Greek copy, as already intimated, refers to some as shrinking from the "kind of attention" shown them in the first edict; because the toleration had been granted to "many and different sects." It is highly probable that the objectors were the bishops of the catholic body, who had gained the ear of Constantine, and sought to impress him with the idea of the exclusive right of that body to the name of Christian. That this was their avowed belief is undeniable. Lactantius, who before this had been preceptor to Crispus, the son of Constantine, in Gaul, may be regarded as a faithful exponent of that belief; and has recorded it in expressions

as unequivocal as they are elegant.* On this supposition, the Edict of Milan becomes more intelligible, and is to be interpreted as having special reference to the dominant christian party. The expressions, "the Christians," and "the body of Christians," relate to the catholic church, and all the honours and privileges granted in the edict are for their exclusive advantage.

This view of the spirit and purport of the edict, is confirmed by an ordinance recorded by Eusebius immediately after the edict itself, the title of which reads as follows:—"Copy of another ordinance which was issued by the emperors, indicating that the benefit was conferred solely on the catholic church." In the body of the ordinance we find the following provision:—"Whence it is our will, that when thou shalt receive this epistle, if any of those things belonging to the catholic church of the Christians, in the several cities or other places, are now possessed either by the decurions, or any others, these thou shalt cause immediately to be restored to their churches. Since we have previously determined, that whatsoever these same churches before possessed, shall be restored to their right." It is observable that in the Edict of Milan the phrase, "the catholic church," does not occur. Here, however, it does; and the reference, in the last sentence of the extract from the ordinance, to what had been previously determined, shows clearly what were the aims of the edict itself. It is scarcely correct, therefore, to regard the celebrated Edict of Milan as an edict of universal toleration. While it did not meddle with the institutions of paganism, but left them as they were, it conceded special privileges to the catholic party amongst the Christians, and ignored all other Christians who dissented from it. It remains to be seen how, in the course of time, the precedence given to this body was

* Div. Inst., lib. iv. De vera Sapientia, 30. He speaks of the catholic church as "the fountain of truth, the habitation of the faith, the temple of God, into which if any one has not entered, or from which if any one departs, he is a stranger to the hope of life and eternal salvation;" and mentions confession and penance as the marks of the true church.

followed by the persecution of those who differed from it in doctrine, and of those who adhered more closely to the earlier practice of the christian churches.

Two events happened during this year, both of which tended to bring Constantine nearer to the object of his ambition. The first was the death of Diocletian at Salona, where he had passed so many years in peaceful retirement. Unlike Maximian he had never repented the act of abdication; and although it must often have wounded his pride to hear tidings of the failure of that system of government which had originated with him, nothing could ever induce him to return to the cares and vicissitudes of public life. In his declining years he found the processes of horticulture more pleasing and fruitful than the toils of empire and the glory of war. The other event was the death of Maximin Daza. During the Italian war, he had sympathized with Maxentius, while Licinius had acted as the ally of Constantine. Indeed, the latter had for some time been betrothed to Constantia, the sister of Constantine, and was married to her at Milan, at the time when the Edict of Toleration was decreed by the two emperors. It so happened that both were summoned from the scene of festivity to the field of battle; the one to Gaul, to repel an insurrection of the Franks, and the other to the east, where Maximin Daza was preparing to invade the European provinces subject to Licinius. The forces of Maximin Daza were much superior in point of number to those of his rival; but they were repelled and routed at Heraclea; and Maximin, after many attempts to escape his pursuers, surrendered at Tarsus, where, according to some, he endured a lingering death by poison; according to others, was simply put to death.* The character and deeds of Maximin have been depicted in the darkest colours by contemporary writers, especially by the panegyrists of Constantine. By his death the pagans were delivered from a cruel and rapacious tyrant, and the Christians from a persecutor who hated them with perfect hatred, and

* Both Eusebius and Lactantius ascribe the defeat and death of Maximin to miraculous interposition.

whose government was never lenient towards them, except through fear of his rivals. He went so far on one occasion as to grant an edict of toleration in favour of the oppressed Christians; but, almost before it could come into full operation he changed his mind and turned persecutor once more. His death, therefore, was no calamity to either party.* It augmented the dominions of Licinius, who now found himself master of both the European and Asiatic east; and in all probability fostered that ambition which in the end involved him in ruin.

The friendship that existed between Constantine and Licinius was not of long continuance, which had never been sincere on either side. While both were ambitious, and regarded each other as obstacles in the way of universal empire, their policy differed in respect to the methods by which supremacy was to be acquired. Licinius, perfidious and licentious, preferred the established paganism, with its costly but easy rites, to the new religion, which, however corrupted from its original purity, was professedly intolerant of all profligacy and cruelty; and trusted in the majority who adhered to the old religion for his final aggrandizement. He soon repented the act by which, in conjunction with Constantine, he had lent his sanction to the worship of the Christians, and proceeded, by gradual but sure measures, to convince his subjects that he had no real intention of changing either his religion or his policy. At first he forbade the holding of synods in his dominions, and restricted the bishops to their own dioceses; he then dismissed all Christians from his service, or reduced them to the condition of menials and slaves; and at length he endeavoured to compel all over whom he held direct authority to sacrifice to the gods, and interfered with the more private assemblies of the church. In some places, if we may credit Eusebius, the governors, acting under his

* Gibbon has given a faithful and affecting account of the cruelty of Maximin towards Valeria, the widow of Galerius, and daughter of Diocletian, and the yet greater cruelty of Licinius, in causing both Valeria and her mother, Prisca, to be beheaded. Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 14.

authority, committed unheard-of barbarities upon the bishops and their adherents, after levelling some of their churches to the ground, or closing them against all who had been accustomed to frequent them.*

Constantine, on the other hand, took a more profound view of the state of the empire. Although it is very difficult, if not impossible, to regard him as a Christian, his character was free from the vices that were so conspicuous in Licinius, quite equal to the demands of the church of that period, and, indeed, worthy of comparison with that of many who ministered at her altars.† There was no difficulty, therefore, on the part of the dominant christian sect in receiving his overtures, and submitting to his authority. He also saw that, whatever might be the numerical superiority of paganism, Christianity had the advantage in moral power, and would in the end prove victorious, especially if countenanced and established by imperial edicts. In addition to this, he could not fail to perceive that, although the religion of Christ required freedom of conscience for its complete development, such was the constitution and such the actual ordering of the catholic church, that a more fitting agency could not be devised for gradually bringing all his subjects into a condition of surveillance and a state of subordination to his own government, than his placing himself in a friendly manner at its head. We find him, therefore, every day connecting himself by closer ties to the catholic party—patronizing its bishops, contributing to the erection and embellishment of its churches, and vindicating its claims against all opponents, whether pagans or Christians. He even ventured to interfere, at this early period, in the differences which arose amongst its members,‡ and was not slow to learn that in the dominions of Licinius were many who sympathized

* Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book i. chaps. 51—56. Book ii. chaps. 1, 2.

† See the testimony of Mosheim and other historians to the character of the clergy at this period.

‡ For example, in the North African disputes consequent upon he election of Cæcilianus.

with him, because he had boldly patronized the party to which they belonged, while their own ruler despised and oppressed them.

While the two emperors were thus regarding one another, an event happened that led to open variance and war. Bassianus, a Roman of good family and fortune, had been elevated by Constantine to the rank of Cæsar, probably with a view to assuming the government of Italy or Africa, as circumstances might dictate. The promotion, however, was accompanied by conditions that were somewhat humiliating, and that produced estrangement between him and his superior. Licinius gave his sanction to the appointment, but availed himself of the discontentment of Bassianus to conspire against the authority of Constantine. He entered into a secret correspondence with him, and incited him to attempt the seizure of that power which had been, as he said, so unjustly limited. The vigilance of Constantine detected the treacherous proceedings. Before the plans of Bassianus could be brought into operation he was apprehended and degraded, and, although Constantine had only recently given him his sister Anastasia in marriage, he was put to death. The complicity of Licinius in this treason, his refusal to deliver up some of the conspirators who had fled to his dominions, and other circumstances of an aggravating nature, led to a sudden and open rupture between the two emperors. The first battle, at Cibalis, near the conflux of the Danube and the Save, in Illyricum, terminated in favour of Constantine. His rival was compelled to flee at the head of his cavalry after losing twenty thousand men; and passing through Sirmium, the capital of Illyricum, had only time to snatch his wife and treasures from the grasp of the pursuer. In a short time, however, he recruited his forces in Thrace and Dacia, and ventured to dispute the supremacy of Constantine in another engagement, at Mardia in Thrace. Here again, though not so decisively as before, Constantine came off victorious. Licinius now sued for peace, which was granted on terms as humiliating to himself as they were advantageous to Constantine. The battle of Cibalis took place on the 8th

of October, 314, and the treaty of peace a few weeks later. By these events Constantine augmented his dominions; adding to them the whole European east, with the exception of Thrace, which, together with Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, he left in the hands of the humbled Licinius. At the same time, and by the terms of the treaty, it was settled that Constantine might nominate two Cæsars for the west, and Licinius one for the east.* The superiority of the former was thus conceded, and for eight years comparative tranquillity prevailed throughout the Roman empire.

During this season of peace between the two rulers of the world, many events occurred having an important relation to the family and government of Constantine, and illustrating the nature of that ascendency which he had now acquired. His three sons were born during this period—Constantine, the eldest, by Fausta, at Arles, A.D. 316; Constantius, the second, in Illyricum, in 317; and Constans, the third, in 323. Their education was carefully attended to. Crispus, his first-born by Minervina, had been under the training and instruction of the celebrated Lactantius, and was at this time a young man of great talent and military valour. The younger branches of his family were equally provided for. According to Eusebius, "men of approved piety were appointed to be their instructors in religious knowledge, Constantine himself sharing in the task. At the same time, he assigned

* This treaty is mentioned by several contemporary writers; but the appointment of the Cæsars is involved in chronological confusion. Compare Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 14, with Manso's Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 363—367. According to the latter, Crispus, the son of Constantine by Minervina, and the younger Constantine, by Fausta, were raised to the dignity of Cæsars, on the 1st of March, 317, at the same time with the younger Licinius. Victor, in Epit. 41, 4, is the authority for this date. The younger Constantine was born in the previous year, or in 316, and the younger Licinius in 315. To confuse the matter yet more, the quinquennalia of the Cæsars were celebrated in 321.

them the most accomplished teachers of secular learning, by whom they were taught the arts of war, and trained in political and legal science. To each, moreover, was granted a truly royal retinue, consisting of infantry, spearmen, and body-guards, with every other kind of military force, commanded respectively by captains, tribunes, and generals, of whose warlike skill and devotion to his sons the emperor had had previous experience."* From this testimony, however, much abatement must be made. The subsequent history of these princes abundantly proves that amidst the adulation and luxury of a court they acquired little of that manly virtue, and still less of that self-control and knowledge of human nature, without which the advantages of royal descent and the glory of hereditary dominion are of small value and brief continuance.

The administration of Constantine, during this season, was conducted with singular vigilance and ability. The cares of augmented empire seemed to sit lightly upon him. Not having yet reached the ultimate object of his ambition, he appeared to be supplied with an unfailing spring of energy and zeal. As if mindful of the fact, that he might yet have to wage war against his only rival in circumstances more trying than any that had yet arisen, he held his troops under perfect discipline, inspecting them in person, as he passed from one portion of his dominions to another, and keeping them in constant exercise against the barbarians of the north.† At the same time, he paid minute attention to the civil affairs of the empire, and enacted various laws and regulations; some of a more private and local, and others of a more general nature, affecting property, morals, and the rights and privileges of his subjects.‡ From the specimens of these with which we are acquainted, it would

* Life of Constantine, book iv. chap. 51.

† In 319 we find the legions engaged in a great war against the Sarmatians and Franks; in 321 Crispus signalized himself by a victory obtained over the latter; and in 323 the vast hordes of the Goths were driven back to their own regions.

‡ Many of these civil regulations will be found in the Codex Theodosianus.

appear that Constantine now began to legislate in the spirit of the Jewish lawgiver, and, in some instances, with a severity that tended to defeat the ends of justice. In other instances, however, the genius of humanity prevailed, and the world at large reaped the benefit.

Although Constantine was so busily engaged in the various departments of duty adverted to, he found time for making himself better acquainted, to a considerable extent, with the constitution and laws of the catholic church, and for taking it more and more under his supervision. In A.D. 313, he first interfered, in a marked and public manner, in the internal operations of that body. A dispute had long been pending in North Africa, which originated in the appointment of Cæcilianus to the vacant bishopric of Carthage. The election had been carried by the clergy and people, and the ceremony of consecration had been performed by the African bishops. But the Numidian bishops took offence at their exclusion from the ceremonial, cited Cæcilianus to give them an explanation of his conduct, and, on his refusing to submit to their judgment, appointed Majorinus to the bishopric in his stead. Large parties of adherents now gathered round the two rival bishops, and for a long period the catholic body was rent asunder by the most violent contentions. The relation of Carthage and its bishop to the whole of that extensive country was such, that every province, district, city, and village, was involved in the dispute, which, after all, could not be settled by any existing authority. These painful circumstances were submitted to Constantine by Anulinus, the proconsul of Africa; and the emperor, without hesitation, instituted a method of settlement. He placed the matter in the hands of Miltiades, the bishop of Rome, directing him, in conjunction with some others, to adjudicate on the subject. The following epistle will testify to the kind of authority exercised by Constantine at this period:—

"Constantinus Augustus, to Miltiades, bishop of Rome, and to Marcus. As many communications of this kind have been sent to me from Anulinus, the most illustrious

proconsul of Africa, in which it is contained that Cæcilianus, the bishop of Carthage, was accused in many respects by his colleagues in Africa; and as this appears to be grievous, that in those provinces which Divine Providence has freely entrusted to my fidelity, and in which there is a vast population, the multitude are found inclining to deteriorate, and in a manner divided into two parties, and among others, that the bishops were at variance; I have resolved that the same Cæcilianus, together with ten bishops, who appear to accuse him, and ten others, whom he himself may consider necessary for his cause, shall sail to Rome; that you, being present there, as also Reticius, Maternus, and Marinus, your colleagues, whom I have commanded to hasten to Rome for this purpose, may be heard, as you may understand most consistent with the most sacred law. And, indeed, that you may have the most perfect knowledge of these matters, I have subjoined to my own epistle copies of the writings sent to me by Anulinus, and sent them to your aforesaid colleagues; in which your gravity will read and consider in what way the aforesaid cause may be most accurately investigated and justly decided; since it neither escapes your diligence, that I show such regard for the holy catholic church, that I wish you, upon the whole, to leave no room for schism or division. May the power of the great God preserve you many years, most esteemed."*

It is evident from this that Constantine acted on his own authority as emperor, as his predecessors had been accustomed to do in relation to the priesthood and religion of paganism. It is equally evident that the holy catholic church was quite prepared to submit to his dictation, although he was not in any sense a member of their body, for the sake of the protection and patronage he afforded them. The several parties met, according to the imperial command, in A.D. 313, and the bishop of Rome and his three coadjutors decided the dispute in favour of Cæcilianus.† The Numidian bishops, however, were dissatisfied with

* Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. book x. chap. 5.

† According to Mosheim, the three were augmented afterwards to eighteen; but he gives no authority for the statement.

the decision, and the cause was tried again at Arles, in the following year. Eusebius has preserved a copy of the mandate sent to one of the bishops summoned to meet on the business in that city. It is addressed to Chrestus, bishop of Syracuse, and, after stating the causes of dissatisfaction with the decision of Miltiades, concludes as follows: —"Since, therefore, we have commanded many bishops to meet together from different and remote places, in the city of Arles, towards the Kalends of August, I have also thought proper to write to thee, that taking a public vehicle from the most illustrious Latronianus, corrector of Sicily, and taking with thee two others of the second rank, whom thou mayest select, also three servants to afford you services on the way; I would have you meet them within the same day at the aforesaid place; that by the weight of your authority, and the prudence and unanimity of the rest that assemble, this dispute, which has disgracefully continued until the present time, in consequence of certain disgraceful contentions, may be discussed, by hearing all that shall be alleged by those who are now at variance, whom we have also commanded to be present, and thus the controversy be reduced, though slowly, to that faith and observance of religion, and fraternal concord, which ought to prevail. May Almighty God preserve thee in safety many years."* The commands of the emperor were again obeyed; all the more willingly, because of the bountiful provision made for the journey. A large number of bishops met at Arles on the first of August, and thereby evinced their cheerful subjection to the authority of the emperor.† The decision was again carried in favour of Cæcilianus. But even this was unsatisfactory to the opponents of the bishop. An appeal was made to the emperor himself, who eventually investigated the whole matter at Milan, in A.D. 316. By this act the emperor constituted himself, what Eusebius often designates him,

* Eccl. Hist. book x. chap. 5.

† According to some, forty-seven bishops were present; but Ado reckons the number as six hundred. The last number is quite absurd. Tillemont, Mem. Eccl. tom. vi. p. 422.

a universal bishop; while the disputants who appealed and submitted to his authority, in a cause so palpably pertaining to the internal regulations and discipline of the catholic church, proved that they cared more for the success of their respective favourities than they did for the theory of their own ecclesiastical system. Constantine was induced to hear the appeal by the expectation that his decision would be considered final by both parties, and probably felt himself flattered by this reference to his arbitration. But he had miscalculated the consequences of meddling with the affairs of ecclesiastics. Though he confirmed the decisions of his commissaries* on the two former occasions, the opponents of Cæcilianus still held out against him. Instead of subsiding, the dispute became more violent than ever, and involved new and more general considerations. The emperor himself was accused, in bitter invectives, of being influenced by improper motives in delivering his judgment, and was provoked to the adoption of measures of which he had never dreamed when he first interfered in the business. Irritated and enraged, he laid aside the mild and paternal character generally assumed in reference to the religious affairs of his christian subjects; commanded, where before he had practised the arts of persuasion; and at length, all his measures failing, proceeded to extremities, by banishing some of the bishops, and by even putting to death others, on the ground of their insolence and insubordination. The result was a widespread disaffection in Africa, that was never allayed during his reign, innumerable tumults and insurrections, and a large amount of bloodshed. The melancholy history of the Donatists may be traced, in its beginnings, to the interference of Constantine in the ecclesiastical differences of his African subjects.†

* The courts of inquiry at Rome and Arles have been called synods, but improperly. The bishops who acted in obedience to the summons of the emperor were neither more nor less than his commissaries for the occasion.

† Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 21; Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. cent. iv. part ii. chap. 5.

The relation assumed by Constantine towards the catholic church at this period, is sufficiently illustrated by these details. Whatever construction may be put upon his motives, it is sufficiently apparent that he exercised as much of lordship as his predecessors had done in their relation to the pagan superstition. The catholic body were protected and patronized by special decrees in their favour, but on condition that they should submit to his supreme will. He restored their churches, increased their wealth, and multiplied their orders, that he might secure their more ready and cheerful obedience.

It was during this period, or in A.D. 321, that he issued an edict enjoining the solemn observance of Sunday, as well as the day before. Eusebius has recorded this in such eulogistic terms, that, if he were to be credited, we should be almost warranted in accepting the designation given to Constantine by later ecclesiastical writers, as "the equal of the apostles." The following is his account of the matter:—

"He ordained, too, that one day should be regarded as a special occasion for prayer: I mean that which is truly the first and chief of all, the day of our Lord and Saviour. The entire care of his household was entrusted to deacons and other ministers consecrated to the service of God, and distinguished by gravity of life and every other virtue: while his trusty body-guard, strong in affection and fidelity to his person, found in their emperor an instructor in the practice of piety, and, like him, held the Lord's salutary day in honour, and performed on that day the devotions which he loved. The same observance was recommended by this blessed prince to all classes of his subjects; his earnest desire being gradually to lead all mankind to the worship of God. Accordingly he enjoined on all the subjects of the Roman empire to observe the Lord's day, as a day of rest, and also to honour the day which precedes the Sabbath; in memory, I suppose, of what the Saviour of mankind is recorded to have achieved on that day. And since his desire was to teach his whole army zealously to honour the Saviour's day (which derives its name from light and from the sun), he freely granted to those among them who were

partakers of the divine faith, leisure for attendance on the services of the church of God, in order that they might be able, without impediment, to perform their religious worship."*

In the same year, Constantine issued a decree granting to all his subjects permission to bequeath their fortunes to the catholic church; which became afterwards one of the laws of the empire,† and the source of that superabundant wealth by means of which the clergy were so lamentably corrupted in later times. His liberality knew no bounds. The idle but subservient ecclesiastics were supported to a large extent at the public expense; a regular allowance was made to the ecclesiastical funds of each city, for the support of those who had devoted themselves to the monastic life; and in every way the emperor sought to lay the catholic Christians under an obligation to reverence and serve him.

At the same time, it is observable that Constantine did not, during this period at least, act so thoroughly christian a part, as to place the sincerity of his profession beyond all suspicion. He took considerable pains to ingratiate himself with his pagan subjects, even while he was making such bold advances towards the catholics; and endeavoured to conceal from them his ultimate designs. We have already noticed the obscurity in which his profession of christianity was veiled, at the time of his triumph over Maxentius. There was the same concession to the prejudices of the pagans now. The name Sunday, by which he distinguished the Lord's-day, and of which Eusebius has given so ingenious an explanation, was no doubt adopted, as Gibbon has suggested, that it might not offend their ears.‡ He still retained the title of *pontifex maximus*—a purely heathen

* Life of Constantine, book iv. chap. 18. In the next two chapters, Eusebius mentions another statute, directing the pagan soldiers to pray on the Lord's day, and giving the form of prayer to be used by them. It is observable, that in this form of prayer there is no mention of the name of Christ.

† Cod. Theodos. l. xvi. tit. ii. leg. 4.

‡ Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 20. It is called in the edict, "Dies solis."

title, assumed by his heathen predecessors.* His image, or effigies, still appeared along with that of Jupiter, Hercules, and Apollo. And the very year in which he commanded his subjects to observe the Sabbath, he issued an edict directing the regular consultation of auruspices.† The catholics must have been very easy to please, when they fawned upon and flattered an emperor, whose piety was evinced in so equivocal a manner, more especially as he had not yet submitted even to baptism, the initiatory rite of their holy religion.

* Zosimus, iv. xxxvi. 4—8. See the note in Manso on this subject, p. 105.

† Cod. Theodos. l. xvi. tit. x. leg. 1. He made similar provisions in A.D. 319, Cod. Theodos. l. ix. tit. xvi. leg. 1, 2.

CHAPTER X.

CONSTANTINE DETERMINES TO WAGE WAR AGAINST LICINIUS—PREPARATIONS ON BOTH SIDES—THE BATTLE OF HADRIANOPLE—THE SIEGE OF BYZANTIUM — THE FINAL ENGAGEMENT AT CHRYSOPOLIS—THE DEFEAT AND BANISHMENT OF LICINIUS—THE MARVELLOUS STORIES OF EUSEBIUS—THE POSITION OF CONSTANTINE AS SOLE RULER OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE—HE RETAINS HIS ATTACHMENT TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH—LEGISLATES IN ITS FAVOUR—EDICT TO THE PROVINCE OF PALESTINE —ITS CHARACTER—EDICT RELATING TO POLYTHEISM—THE SPIRIT IN WHICH HE COMMENCED HIS REIGN. A.D. 323, 324.

THE friendship that subsisted between Constantine and Licinius, during the events narrated in the last chapter, was never very cordial, and at length terminated. Whatever doubt may exist respecting the cause of previous differences, there can be none in reference to those now under consideration. Both pagan and ecclesiastical historians agree in tracing them to Constantine; the only point of variation being that which relates to his motives. The former charge him with waging war against Licinius for the sake of his own aggrandizement;* the latter justify him, as a direct agent of the Almighty, in destroying a tyrant whose opposition to the Christians, and especially the christian bishops, had provoked the divine displeasure. Eusebius does not hesitate to characterise it as a religious war; and, after giving copious details of the persecutions and cruelties inflicted by Licinius on his christian subjects, states that Constantine devoted himself to his chastisement and overthrow. "He was not long in perceiving," says

* Eutropius, x. 5; Zosimus, ii. 15.

this writer, "the intolerable nature of the evils of which he had heard; and, forming at once a steadfast resolution, he tempered the natural clemency of his character with a certain measure of severity and sternness, and hastened to succour those who were thus grievously oppressed; for he judged that it would rightly be deemed a pious and holy task to secure, by the removal of an individual, the safety of the greater part of the human race. He judged, too, that if he listened to the dictates of clemency only, and bestowed his pity on one utterly unworthy of it, this would, on the one hand, confer no real benefit on a man whom nothing would induce to abandon his evil practices, and whose fury against his subjects would only be likely to increase; while, on the other hand, those who suffered from his oppression would thus be for ever deprived of all hope of deliverance. Influenced by these reflections, the emperor resolved, without further delay, to extend a protecting hand to those who had fallen into such an extremity of distress. He accordingly made the usual warlike preparations, and assembled his whole forces, both of horse and foot."*

Great preparations were made, on both sides, for this last and decisive conflict. Licinius collected an army of fifteen thousand horse, and a hundred and fifty thousand foot, and a fleet of three hundred and fifty galleys. Both the army and navy of Constantine were inferior in numbers; the former consisting of a hundred and twenty thousand horse and foot, and the latter of no more than two hundred small vessels. But the discipline and experience of the forces collected by Constantine rendered them more than a match for those of his enemy, who, probably under the influence of fear occasioned by former defeats, awaited his approach in the neighbourhood of Hadrianople, without venturing to act on the aggressive. The army of the west marched through Thessalonica and a portion of Thrace, and came within sight of the city. The sides of the mountain leading up to it were covered with the soldiers of Licinius, while the Hebrus separated the contending armies. Constantine, at the head of his legions, forced his passage across the

* Life of Constantine, book ii. chap. 3.

river,* at the same time that a body of archers posted themselves, five thousand strong, in the enemy's rear. The army of Licinius was thus drawn from its advantageous position into the plain, and there totally defeated. Thirty-four thousand are said to have been slain; the camp was taken by assault; and Licinius, fleeing in haste, shut himself up within the walls of Byzantium.

The battle of Hadrianople thus terminated in favour of Constantine, on the 3rd of July, A.D. 323; but Licinius, though defeated, was not inclined to surrender to his mortal enemy. Byzantium was well fortified and provisioned; and the navy of Licinius was at least twice as powerful as that of Constantine. The latter, however, was bent upon the ruin of his foe, and determined to besiege the city. Crispus, his eldest son, was appointed to force the passage of the Hellespont, and engage the fleet of Licinius. Such was his skill and fortune, that in two days he obtained a complete victory over Amandus, the admiral of Licinius. The Hellespont was thus free for the transport of provisions to the camp of Constantine, who now laid close siege to the town. Foreseeing the inevitable result of the preparations made by his enemy, Licinius removed from Byzantium to Chalcedon, in Asia, and collected a new army of fifty thousand men. Without raising the siege, Constantine sent a portion of his army in pursuit of the fugitive. The final battle was fought at Chrysopolis, since known as Scutari; where twenty-five thousand of the newly-raised troops were slain, and Licinius, totally ruined, was compelled to retire to Nicomedia. Negotiations were now entered into with Constantine for his life; Constantia, his wife, and sister of Constantine, interceding on his behalf. The victorious emperor listened to the impassioned entreaty, and reluctantly granted it; but on condition that Martinianus, whom Licinius had raised to the dignity of Cæsar during the siege of Byzantium, should be sacrificed, and that Licinius himself should resign the purple, abdicate the

* Zosimus states that Constantine, accompanied by twelve horsemen, crossed the river, and put to flight a host of an hundred and fifty thousand men.

throne for ever, and spend the remainder of his days in banishment. The humbled and dethroned ruler survived his degradation only for a few months.

The battle of Chrysopolis terminated the war on the 9th September, 324; and Licinius was put to death secretly at Thessalonica, in the course of the following year. Later ecclesiastical writers, partisans of Constantine, have justified his conduct, on the ground of an alleged treason on the part of his victim; but the preponderating testimony of contemporaries leaves him without excuse, while Eutropius unhesitatingly accuses him of violating his most sacred oath.*

In our account of this and the previous struggles between Licinius and Constantine, we have omitted all the marvellous stories related by Eusebius respecting the causes of Constantine's success:—how he was favoured with special revelations from heaven; how an apparition was seen in the cities subject to Licinius, as of Constantine's victorious troops passing through them; how the salutary trophy became an effectual remedy against disasters; how one of the cross-bearers who fled from his post was slain, while all who faithfully stood their ground were preserved; how Constantine carried about with him the tabernacle of the cross, as a kind of oratory, where he was honoured with divine manifestations, like Moses before him, and whence he issued, as if moved by a divine impulse, to do certain and terrible execution upon his enemies. All these things and the like we pass over, although some of them are vouched for on the word of Constantine himself; lest the reader should be induced to regard the entire testimony of the credulous historian as a tissue of fables. At the same time, the reader should be put in possession of the fact that such statements are made with perfect seriousness, in order to make proper abatement from other passages of the same

* Europius, x. 6. "In spite of a most sacred oath to the contrary, he was secretly put to death at Thessalonica." Zosimus and Jerome confirm this testimony. Eusebius states that Licinius was put to death, being dealt with according to the laws of war; thus passing over the undeniable fact, that he had been pardoned.

writer, which magnify Constantine as one of the most devout and perfect of God's saints. It will materially aid us in forming an opinion respecting the character of the so-called first christian emperor, if we bear in mind the fact, that the principal contemporary witness to his sincerity and exalted piety is the bishop of Cæsarea.

Constantine had now attained the object of his ambition. Step by step, he had advanced from the common ranks of the army to the place of supreme power and universal empire. With a purpose that never faltered, and an aim that never erred, he had been steadily advancing to his present position, ever since the day when he was first saluted as worshipful Augustus by the army of Gaul and Britain. His early schooling in the adverse court of Galerius had not been lost upon him; and with consummate ability he afterwards coped with the many difficulties that lay in his path. He had looked on with calmness when he beheld some of his rivals contending with each other in conflicts that, however settled, were certain to terminate to his advantage; he had waited patiently when he saw others wasting their energies and their resources on expensive and dissolute pleasures; and he had never hesitated, from any compunctions of conscience, to rush in with his well-disciplined legions, and strike the fatal blow, when he saw yet another class too enfeebled to parry it with success. Now, his last rival was put out of the way, and a dominion had fallen into his hands that embraced nearly the whole known and civilized world. It was henceforth his care to keep what he had acquired; and to this object he devoted all his energies with unwearied assiduity.

According to the plan already acted upon in those portions of the empire that were previously subject to him, Constantine remained firm in his attachment to the catholic church, now that he was the undisputed master of the world. It was by the symbol of the cross that he had gained the victory; and it was by the unity and subordination of the church that he hoped to establish himself

firmly upon his throne, without fear of molestation. He had judged rightly, that the extension of the ecclesiastical system, and its consolidation in every part of his dominions, would be more efficient than police or military; while the whole would be entirely under his control. The confederation subsisting between the several branches of that church, extending to the remotest parts of the globe, and cemented by associations stronger than those of family and place, had already worked admirably for his purpose. In the late struggle, he saw how his championship of the Christians had enlisted in his favour a large portion of the subjects of Licinius; and he did not doubt that now, by an extension of the same ecclesiastical arrangements, all the provinces of his vast empire might be brought into a manageable compass. It became, therefore, from this time, one of the aims of his policy, even more steadily than before, to bring all his subjects under the discipline of the new religion. It may be that, at the same time, he appreciated the advantages of Christianity, even in its corrupted state, over the inanities and abominations of polytheism, and was sustained in all his attempts to propagate it by a conviction of its superior claims.

Such being the views and designs of Constantine, we are not surprised to find that one of his earliest acts was to place the hitherto oppressed Christians of the east on an equal footing with their brethren in other provinces. Those who had been banished on account of their religion were recalled; those who, for the same reason, had been adjudged to serve in the civil courts, or had been deprived of their property, had restitution made to them; such as had been compelled to labour in the mines were immediately released from bondage and rewarded for their fidelity; and the estates of martyrs, who had laid down their lives in confession of Christ, were restored to their nearest kindred, or in default of such kindred, vested in the church. These and similar regulations were enacted and observed.* Two of Constantine's edicts, issued at

* Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book ii. chaps. 20, 21.

this period in the Latin and Greek languages, have been preserved in the pages of Eusebius.

The first is addressed to the inhabitants of the province of Palestine, "respecting piety towards God, and the Christian religion." In one part of it he boasts of being the chosen instrument of God to accomplish his will, in the destruction of those who had persecuted the Christians; and claims the merit of having banished every form of evil that had previously prevailed in the other provinces of the empire. Those who are willing to justify the former of these assumptions can scarcely admit the latter, especially if it be remembered how, up to this very period, Constantine had not only tolerated, but even sanctioned many of the customs and rites of polytheism. It is also observable, that the catholic church is referred to in those portions of the edict which relate to the restoration of the property and lands of the Christians; the edict adverted to in a previous chapter, which restricted all the privileges granted in the Edict of Milan to the members of the catholic church, being now as fully applicable to the east as to the west. Indeed, Eusebius himself asserts this; since, in stating that Constantine's enactments were carried into effect, he says, "Those persons who were *legally* entitled to it, received the benefit of the emperor's liberality."

Thus, throughout the whole empire, the catholic church became established. By imperial edicts and regulations, this body of christian professors was selected as the exclusive depository of divine truth and salvation, and all dissidents, of whatever name or character, were either ignored or persecuted.

The other edict, issued about the same time, was addressed to the people of the provinces, "concerning the error of polytheism." It professes to be an exposition of Constantine's own religious views and experience, and is quite equal to anything of the kind ever issued by a monarch. After contrasting the piety and humanity of his father with the cruelty of the persecutors, and tracing the origin of the Diocletian persecution to the silence of the oracle of Apollo, which was attributed to the influence of the

Christians, he gives an account of the impression produced on his own mind by these events, and by the retribution that overtook the persecutors. He then confesses the efficacy of the standard of the cross in all the victories he had obtained; offers up prayer and praise to God, in a singular strain of humility and invective, and concludes as follows:—

"These are our words; and we have enlarged on these topics more than our ordinary clemency would have dictated, because we were unwilling to dissemble or be false to the true faith; and the more so, since we understand there are some who say that the rites of the heathen temples, and the power of darkness, have been entirely removed. We should indeed have earnestly recommended such removal to all men, were it not that the rebellious spirit of those wicked errors still continues obstinately fixed in the minds of some, so as to discourage the hope of any general restoration of mankind to the ways of truth."*

Such was the spirit in which Constantine commenced his reign as sole and universal ruler. It was evidently his design to set up the catholic church as the established church of the empire, and to uproot the ancient paganism on the one hand, and all dissident christian sects on the other, whenever the safety of the state permitted so great a change to be brought about. From this time, all his measures were concerted with a view to the accomplishment of this object. It was, undoubtedly, a grand design to abolish polytheism, to close the temples of idolatry, to put an end to all the absurd and polluting rites of the old superstition; and in their place to establish the one church of the faithful. But to effect this by authority and force was not only inconsistent with the genius of christianity, and the precept and example of its divine Founder, but was also to introduce new evils, which in the long run might prove as pernicious and lasting as those that were removed. If Constantine had simply tolerated all religions, favouring none, enacting equitable laws for the prevention of public scandal, intolerance, crime, and injustice, and within these

* For the above edicts, see Life of Constantine, book ii. chaps. 48—60.

limits had permitted the utmost latitude of speech and worship, how different a result would have attended his measures from what has actually been witnessed. The conflict between christianity and heathenism might have been more protracted; but the result would have been more satisfactory. The differences between Christians might have been more numerous; but they would have been conducted in a better spirit, and have terminated in a truer catholicity—that of truth and reason, instead of authority and form. No one can blame Constantine for not foreseeing how his interference with the religion of the Christians would so affect its character as to prepare the way of the papacy, and terminate in the establishment of the greatest instrument of spiritual despotism the world ever saw — a despotism involving evils inconceivably worse than those of heathenism; but he is justly chargeable with the sin and presumption of imagining that he knew how to promote the grand designs of the christian economy better than the divine Author of that economy himself. When ecclesiastical historians distinguish between the establishment of christianity by the secular power, and the evils which followed, approving of the former and freely censuring the latter; when, as some modern writers have done,* they affirm that the establishment of the church by Constantine was in itself highly beneficial to the progress of religion, while in the same breath they lament over the errors, divisions, superstitions, corruptions, and despotism, that attended or followed it; they seem to forget two things—first, that Christianity is such in its own nature and genius, that directly it is established by force it loses its original character altogether; and, secondly, that the church established by Constantine was, by the very form it assumed as a catholic and hierarchical system, the embodiment and exponent of principles essentially anti-christian, and, therefore, fitted to become the subservient instrument of despotism, and the fruitful source of the evils that are so much deprecated.

* See Waddington's History of the Church, chap. vi. p. 85.

CHAPTER XI.

MEASURES ADOPTED BY CONSTANTINE FOR ADVANCING THE INTERESTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH—HIS DESIGN RESPECTING THE SETTLEMENT OF THEOLOGICAL AND OTHER DIFFERENCES—THE COUNCIL OF NICE, AND CONSTANTINE'S RELATION TO IT—ITS RESULTS—HE CELEBRATES HIS VICENNALIA AT ROME—CRISPUS, YOUNG LICINIUS, AND FAUSTA, SUCCESSIVELY PUT TO DEATH—THE EFFECT PRODUCED ON THE CITIZENS OF ROME. A.D. 325—329.

THE profession of the christian faith thus publicly made by Constantine, was followed by a multiplicity of measures directed, if not adapted, to increase the ranks of the christian party. Strong inducements were held out to the inhabitants of the various cities to embrace the religion of the victorious monarch. The municipal privileges of such as showed great zeal on behalf of the catholic church were augmented, and bribes were offered to the poor to submit to the paternal care of the bishops. In Rome alone, twelve thousand adults were baptized in one year, each convert receiving, as a present from the emperor, a white garment and twenty pieces of gold.* The subjugated barbarian nations rendered a nominal reverence to the cross, and were too loyal not to listen to the instructions of the christian bishops sent amongst them; while missionaries, attended by a large retinue of servants, and fully equipped for their undertaking, travelled to the extremities of the empire, and visited the remotest nations, for the purpose of augmenting the number of the faithful. By these means, the ranks of the christian party were soon multiplied, and those

* Baronius, Annal. Eccl. A.D. 324.

of the pagans diminished. It is not surprising, when we know the methods adopted for making converts, that the last to yield to the new religion were the upper classes, upon whom the bribes of the emperor would have less effect than on their poorer fellow-citizens. Strong inducements, however, were held out to some of the highest rank, in the shape of offices of distinction and emolument. The governors of the several provinces, we are informed, "were mostly such as were devoted to the saving faith; and if any appeared inclined to adhere to gentile worship, he forbade them to offer sacrifices. This law applied, also, to those who surpassed the provincial governors in rank and dignity, and even to those who occupied the highest station. If they were Christians, they were free to act consistently with their profession; if otherwise, the law required them to abstain from idolatrous sacrifices."* While a christian profession was thus honoured, paganism was discountenanced by laws and regulations, which, if not fully carried into effect, indicated the determination of Constantine to extirpate it. The erection of idolatrous images, divination, heathen arts and practices, and sacrifices, were prohibited by law.† Meanwhile, orders were issued to the bishops of the various provinces to repair the old churches, and erect new and larger ones, care being taken to ornament and embellish them in the most costly and gorgeous manner; that by this means the people at large might not feel that they had made any sacrifice of their taste in passing over from the old religion to the new.

Having made these arrangements for the external advancement of the catholic church, Constantine now busied himself with the differences that existed amongst its members, and endeavoured to reduce all things to peace and unity. The Arian controversy, which sprang up at

* Life of Constantine, book ii. chap. 44.

† Most historians affirm that these regulations extended only to private sacrifices, and that the temples were open during the whole of Constantine's reign. Eusebius, however, is positive respecting the law of prohibition itself. See Life of Constantine, book ii. chap. 45.

Alexandria some time before this, and which occasioned so much discussion for many years to come, was not the only controversy that seemed to call for a settlement. His design was, as he himself informs us, "to bring the diverse judgments formed by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity; and to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the malignant power of a grievous distemper." These objects, he thought, might be effected by the exercise of his superior discernment and authority: the first, by what he terms, "the secret gaze of the mental eye;" and the latter, by "the aid of military power."* The latter object was more easily accomplished than the former. Although he sent Florius, the bishop of Cordova, his trusty adviser and agent, to Alexandria, for the purpose of reconciling Alexander the bishop, and Arius the presbyter, with many persuasions to peace and unity, backed by his imperial authority, he found them still at variance.† Indeed, the more he meddled with the church, the more he found it divided. "The effects of that envious spirit," says Eusebius, "which so disturbed the peace of the churches of God in Alexandria, together with the Theban and Egyptian schism, continued to cause him no little anxiety of mind. For, in fact, in every city, bishops were engaged in obstinate conflict with bishops, and people rising against people; and almost, like the fabled Symplegades, coming into violent collision with each other. Nay, some were so far transported beyond the bounds of reason, as to be guilty of reckless and outrageous conduct, and even to insult the statues of the emperor."

Constantine was not the man to be baffled by these difficulties. He had made up his mind to rule in the church, as well as in the empire. In the language of his biographer, who extols his conduct, and sees no incongruity in his assuming such a position in relation to Christ's pro-

* Life of Constantine, book ii. chap. 65.

† Eusebius gives a particular account of this embassy, together with a copy of Constantine's letter to the disputants. Ibid. chaps. 61—73.

fessed people, "he at once aroused the energies of his mind, and declared that he must prosecute to the utmost this war also against the secret adversary who was disturbing the peace of the church."* The result of his deliberations was the convocation of the celebrated council of Nice, which met on May or June 20th, 325. According to Eusebius, who was present, more than two hundred and fifty bishops, accompanied by a crowd of presbyters and deacons, assembled in obedience to the imperial injunction; representatives of the catholic church, from all the principal cities of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The expenses of the council, including the journeys of those who were summoned, and the "sumptuous provision" furnished daily, were defrayed by the emperor. The meetings, which lasted for more than two months, were held at first in the church, but afterwards in the palace; and the emperor presided over the deliberations. The scene which presented itself when he entered the assembly has been graphically described by his biographer:—"As soon as the whole assembly had seated themselves with becoming gravity, a general silence prevailed, in expectation of the emperor's arrival. And first of all three of his immediate family entered in succession, and others also preceded his approach, not of the soldiers or guards who usually accompanied him, but only friends who avowed the faith of Christ. And now, all rising at the signal which indicated the emperor's entrance, at last he himself proceeded through the midst of the assembly, like some heavenly messenger of God, clothed in raiment which glittered as it were with rays of light, reflecting the glowing radiance of a purple robe, and adorned with the brilliant splendour of gold and precious stones. Such was the external appearance of his person; and with regard to his mind, it was evident that he was distinguished by piety and godly fear. This was indicated by his downcast eyes, the blush on his countenance, and the modesty of his gait. For the rest of his personal excellences, he surpassed all present in height of stature and beauty of form, as well as in majestic dignity of mien,

* Life of Constantine, book iii. chap. 5.

and invincible strength and vigour. All these graces, united to a suavity of manner, and a serenity becoming his imperial station, declared the excellence of his mental qualities to be above all praise. As soon as he had advanced to the upper end of the seats, at first he remained standing, and when a low chair of wrought gold had been set for him, he waited until the bishops had beckoned to him, and then sat down, and after him the whole assembly did the same."*

After Eusebius, who occupied a chief place in the assembly, had addressed the emperor in a laudatory speech, the emperor rose, and, explaining his reasons for calling them together, exhorted them to become united in one judgment, removing the perplexities of controversy, and embracing the principles of peace. Then the business began; which, if not the real business, was such as might have been expected, notwithstanding the emperor's presence, in such an age, and in such a heterogeneous assembly. Bishop accused bishop, and neighbour recriminated with neighbour; all their great and petty jealousies came out; all their differences were exposed. This lasted for some time; and a more violent controversy than any that had yet arisen seemed to threaten the catholic church. But the emperor knew the materials he had to deal with, and acted accordingly. He allowed the storm to spend itself; gave a patient hearing to all alike; received every proposition with attention; and succeeded by alternate threats and smiles in allaying their animosities, and reducing them to outward unity.† The result of these deliberations is well known. The Arians were condemned: the doctrine of the church in reference to several important points was determined, and a clear line, which served its purpose for some time, was drawn between orthodoxy and heterodoxy; several canons, or regulations, were passed, affecting the

* Life of Constantine, book iii. chap. 10.

† Eusebius himself was opposed to the decision of the council, but yielded. Theodoret (lib. i. cap. 12) has preserved an original letter of his, in which he attempts to justify his conduct. (See Gibbon, Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 21.)

observances and discipline of the Christians; and an epistle was addressed to the churches generally on the topics that had come under deliberation.*

Constantine had already declared, that all who resisted the decision of the council should be banished; and two, at least, of the dissidents suffered this penalty — Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, and Arius, presbyter of Alexandria. The disciples of the latter were branded in one of the imperial edicts, addressed to the bishops and people; and capital punishment was denounced against all in whose hands his writings might be found.† In his letter to the churches respecting this council, Constantine affirms that every question received due and full examination, so that "no room was left for further discussion or controversy in relation to the faith." Such, however, was his indifference or fickleness, that, before three years had elapsed, or in 327, Eusebius was restored to his bishopric, and Arius to the royal favour; the faith of the latter was approved by the council of Jerusalem, and a command was issued by the emperor that he should be formally admitted to the communion in the cathedral of Byzantium; and a little later, the chief opponents of Arius—Athanasius of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, and Paul of Constantinople—were deposed and banished in their turn. Such were the fruits of the first œcumenical or universal council, and such the proofs of Constantine's wisdom in interfering in matters pertaining to religious doctrine and observance. Meanwhile, the catholic church was rent by division and strife as much as before, and the measures adopted to allay these evils only served to augment and multiply them.

While these ecclesiastical matters were proceeding, other events occurred, some of a public and others of a more

* On the subject of this council see besides Eusebius, Socrates, lib. i. cap. 9; Theodoret, lib. i. cap. 12; Semler, cent. iv. cap. 3; Mosheim, Eccl. Hist. cent. iv. part. ii. chap. 5; Gibbon, chap. 21; Waddington's Hist. of the Church, chap. 7.

† "If any man be found to have concealed a copy of those books, and not to have instantly produced it and thrown it into the fire, he shall be put to death."—*Socrates, Hist. Eccl.*, lib. i. cap. 10.

private nature, illustrating either the policy or temper of Constantine. He completed the twentieth year of his reign soon after the termination of the council of Nice, and gave directions that the fact should be celebrated throughout the empire. Festivals were consequently held in all the provinces, while the emperor himself repaired to Rome and observed the vicennalia with much pomp and magnificence, and in the midst of general rejoicings. The citizens, it was thought, would be gratified by the visit, which was more protracted than usual, extending through the months of July, August, and September. Eusebius has recorded his delight at the reception given to himself and his fellow-ecclesiastics with a childish vanity that is somewhat amusing. "Not one of the bishops," he writes, "was wanting at the imperial banquet, the circumstances of which were splendid beyond description. Detachments of the body-guard and other troops surrounded the entrance of the palace with drawn swords, and through the midst of these the men of God proceeded without fear into the innermost of the imperial apartments, in which some were the emperor's own companions at table, while others reclined on couches arranged on either side. One might have thought that a picture of Christ's kingdom was thus shadowed forth, and that the scene was less like a reality than a dream." * After this, the emperor presented gifts to all the bishops, according to their rank; and dismissed them to their several charges, with injunctions to attend to their duties and observe the decisions of the council of Nice.

Scarcely had these rejoicings terminated, before circumstances occurred in the family of Constantine that still

* Life of Constantine, book iii. chap. 15. If the character of Eusebius were not well known, one might have supposed that he wrote ironically rather than seriously. The bishop is right however: it is a dream, and no real representation of the kingdom of Christ. Drawn swords without, and luxurious ease within—such is the picture of the church of that age. Of course, the men of God passed between the drawn swords without fear; because they had submitted to the decisions of the imperial council. But what if they had refused to do so?

throw a dark cloud over his memory, which neither the statements of contemporaries, nor the elucidations of commentators and critics, whether friends or adversaries, can dissipate. We have already adverted to the eldest son of Constantine as the "unfortunate Crispus." The tragic story we are about to narrate will justify the appellation. He was the son of Minervina, and according to the most impartial historians an able and accomplished youth. At the age of seventeen he was promoted to the rank of Cæsar, and signalized himself in the administration of Gaul by several successful expeditions against the Germans. We have already noticed his daring and skill in forcing the straits of the Hellespont, during the siege of Byzantium, and the important bearing of that action on the event of the war. In consequence of these exhibitions of both naval and military genius, he rose high in the public favour, and his name was associated with that of Constantine in the acclamations of the people, who could not imagine otherwise than that the father of such a son would be proud of the flattering notice. The popularity of Crispus, however, is thought to have been the cause of his ruin. From that time the emperor regarded him with jealousy, slighted him, promoted his infant brother, Constantius, to the rank of Cæsar in his stead, and confined him almost as a prisoner to the court. It is possible that Crispus may have resented these indignities; he may even have listened to counsels that somewhat bordered on conspiracy. No matter; the treatment he experienced was unmerited, and might have been expected to produce bitter fruits. At the very time when Constantine was legislating for the peace and unity of the church, he was forming plans for the destruction of his son. He issued an edict in October, 325, that hinted at conspiracy, and invited informers to acquaint him with whatsoever might lead to its detection.* The snare was thus laid, and Crispus was secretly accused to his father. The trial, if trial it may be called, was brief and secret. In the midst of the public rejoicings at Rome, already adverted

* Cod. Theod. lib. ix. tit. iv.

to and described by Eusebius with so much satisfaction, as if nothing had occurred to disturb the general harmony and enthusiasm, the brave youth was seized and bound, hurried away under a strong guard to Pola, in Istria, and there executed. Niebuhr justifies Constantine in this act of parental cruelty and baseness, on the ground that Crispus *may* have entertained thoughts of conspiracy.* There is no proof of this. But, supposing that abundant proof were adduced, and that Constantine was convinced of the guilt of Crispus, what must be thought of the temper of the man who, not satisfied with banishment, could give secret orders for the murder of his son in cold blood? The deed appears yet more criminal, when we remember, that, at this very time, Constantine was assuming the character of a christian emperor and bishop; entertaining at his table the representatives of the catholic church; inditing epistles, and making orations, in which he claimed to be regarded as under the special direction of the Almighty; professing to be deeply concerned for the promotion of true piety and charity; and allowing himself to be extolled to the skies as the most eminent of saints.

Crispus was not the only victim of Constantine's jealousy at this unhappy period. Young Licinius, the son of the late Augustus, was also involved in his fate. He was a mere boy of eleven years of age, having been born in A.D. 315. Although Cæsar, he could only have enjoyed the title, without sharing in the responsibilities of the office; since he was elevated to the dignity at the same time with Crispus and young Constantine, in the year A.D. 317, or before he was two years old. His mother, Constantia, was Constantine's favourite sister, whom he had first betrothed, and afterwards given in marriage to Licinius, with his own hand. When his life seemed in jeopardy, Con-

* Lectures on the Hist. of Rome, lect. lxxix. Gibbon gives a very searching and impartial view of the whole case, as also of that of Licinius and Fausta, well fortified by carefully-selected authorities. Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 18. See also Manso, Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 64—67.

stantia pleaded for him with all the passion of a mother, and with all the confidence of a sister; but neither prayers nor tears availed. His name and rank were his only crime. Overwhelmed with grief and horror, Constantia did not long survive her innocent child; but died in the course of the following year.

The awful tragedy was not yet ended. Fausta, the empress, and mother of all Constantine's remaining children, was the next to suffer. It appears that she was in some way implicated, not in the alleged conspiracy, but in the death of Crispus, of whom she had become jealous, lest his superior merits should extinguish the hopes of her own children. It is probable that she had aided the informers in their allegations respecting Crispus, and according to some had imputed to him criminal intentions respecting herself. It is difficult to ascertain the precise truth respecting these matters, on account of the secrecy in which Constantine veiled all his proceedings in relation to them. It is probable, however, that soon after the death of Crispus a charge of heinous guilt was brought against Fausta, and that she was put to death during the same year.* "Helena, the aged mother of Constantine," says Gibbon, "lamented and revenged the untimely fate of her grandson Crispus: nor was it long before a real or pretended discovery was made, that Fausta herself entertained a criminal connexion with a slave belonging to the imperial stables. Her condemnation and punishment were the instant consequences of the charge; and the adulteress was suffocated by the steam of a bath, which, for that purpose, had been heated to an extraordinary degree. By some it will perhaps be thought, that the remembrance of a conjugal union of twenty years, and the honour of their common offspring, the destined heirs of the throne, might have softened the obdurate heart of Constantine; and persuaded him to suffer his wife, however guilty she might appear, to

* Manso, Leben Constantins des Grossen, pp. 67, 370. Gibbon refers to two orations which seem to imply that she was alive many years after this. Julian, Orat. i.; Monod. in Constantin. Jun. c. 4, ad calcem Eutrop., edit. Havercamp.

expiate her offences in a solitary prison. But it seems a superfluous labour to weigh the propriety, unless we could ascertain the truth of this singular event."*

Eusebius makes no reference whatever to these events in his life of Constantine; his object being to say nothing but good of his patron, and the author of so many benefits to the clergy of the catholic church. The Roman people, however, appear to have exercised their judgment on the subject, and gave expression to their secret indignation, in the only way possible under so watchful a despotism, by a libel affixed to the palace-gate, which compared the reign of Constantine to that of the tyrannical and blood-thirsty Nero.† It was this state of feeling, amongst other things, that probably induced Constantine to quit the city of Rome, never to return to it; and to contemplate the erection of another that might, if possible, eclipse it in greatness and splendour, and at the same time bear his name down to the remotest posterity. Since nothing memorable occurred during the next three years, A.D. 327—329, we pass on to the time when he began to carry this design into execution.

* Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 18.

† Sidon. Apollinar. v. 8, cited by Gibbon, ibid.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSTANTINE BUILDS THE CITY OF CONSTANTINOPLE—ITS MAGNIFICENCE AND COSTLINESS—HIS OCCUPATION AFTER THIS PERIOD—HIS EDICTS AGAINST HERETICS, AND THEIR OPERATION—TRICENNALIA AND CONTEMPORANEOUS EVENTS—PROVIDES HIMSELF A TOMB IN THE CHURCH AT CONSTANTINOPLE—HIS LAST SICKNESS AND BAPTISM—HIS DEATH AND BURIAL—RETROSPECT OF HIS LIFE, CHARACTER, AND GOVERNMENT. A.D. 330—337.

THE determination of Constantine to found a new city that should rival, if not surpass, Rome in extent and splendour, has been attributed to various motives, personal, political, and religious. It seems highly probable that his chief object was to increase the lustre of his name and reign, and to transmit it to posterity by a monument as magnificent and permanent as the wealth and skill of man could construct. For some time he was undecided in the choice of a suitable locality; and Thessalonica, Sardica, and ancient Troy, have been mentioned as presenting claims that rivalled those of Byzantium. The last-named place was at length fixed upon; and its superior advantages have but to be named to be at once recognised. Its central situation, between Asia and Europe,— its temperate climate, fertile soil, capacious harbour, and easy access, point it out as one of the most desirable localities in the world for a great and populous city. The original city, founded by Byzas, the navigator, six hundred and fifty-six years before the christian era, and rebuilt and fortified afterwards by the Spartan general Pausanias, was by no means insignificant. Some of its public edifices were deemed of sufficient importance to be retained under the new plan. With this exception, however, in the course of

a few years, all was changed. The walls of a new city, measuring in circumference between ten and eleven miles, girded a mass of innumerable edifices, including theatres, public and private baths, porticoes, granaries, reservoirs, senate halls, courts of justice, churches, palaces, capacious mansions, a capitol, and hippodrome. To adorn the city, Greece and Asia were despoiled of their rarest ornaments; and the bronze colossal statue of Apollo, supposed to be the work of Phidias, was fixed upon a lofty column in the centre of the forum, which the citizens had the option of regarding as the image of the god of day, or of the emperor Constantine himself. The cost of this great undertaking has been variously estimated; but it must have been immense. The expense of constructing the walls, porticoes, and aqueducts alone, is computed as being little less than three millions of pounds. The foundations were laid, and the city was dedicated, in the year 330, by Constantine himself, who claimed to have commenced the work under the command and by the direction of the supreme God.

From this time Constantine took up his residence in the new city, called after his name; he devoted much of his time to the progress of his grand design. Lured by bribes, and by the great privileges bestowed on the inhabitants, an immense population was soon gathered within its walls; and, although many generations have passed away, and the empire itself has long since perished, the name of the great monarch is still commemorated by the city to which he gave rise.*

The remaining incidents of the life of Constantine are not of sufficient interest to be dwelt upon in detail. Excepting the war against the Goths in 332, and against the Sarmatians in 334, the peace of the empire was undisturbed during the rest of his reign. Fresh churches were built in celebrated localities, and some of them were dedicated by Constantine himself.† The catholic church received his attention and patronage as before; and, from time to time,

* See Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 17, for a full and splendid description of the city and its history.

† Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book iii. chaps. 25—53.

edicts were issued, which showed how completely the clergy were subservient to the will of their new master. He also framed more stringent measures than ever against paganism, closing many of the heathen temples, and despoiling and destroying their idols.*

It was also during this period that severe laws were enacted against the heretics, who were persecuted with a personal rancour and malice that afford an edifying proof of the paternal government of Constantine. "Understand now," says he, addressing them in one of his edicts, "by this present statute, ye Novatians, Valentinians, Marcionites, Paulians, ye who are called Cataphrygians, and all ye who devise and support heresies by means of your private assemblies, with what a tissue of falsehood and vanity, with what destructive and venomous errors, your doctrines are inseparably interwoven; so that through you the healthy soul is stricken with disease, and the living becomes the prey of everlasting death. Ye haters and enemies of truth and life, in league with destruction! . . . Why do I still bear with such abounding evil? . . . Why not at once strike at the root of so great a mischief by a public manifestation of displeasure?" Such was the haughty and bitter language in which he addressed some of the holiest men and purest Christians of his day. But words would have fallen harmless upon them, as he very well knew. Therefore the edict proceeds to forbid their assembling together, in the following terms:—"We give warning by this present statute, that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together. We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies; and our care in this respect extends so far as to forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings, not in public merely, but in any private house or place whatsoever. Let those of you, therefore, who are desirous of embracing the true and pure religion, take the far better course of entering the catholic church, and uniting with it

* Ibid. chaps. 54—58; Labanius, Orat. pro Templis, edit. Gothofred, p. 9.

in holy fellowship, whereby you will be enabled to arrive at the knowledge of the truth. In any case, the delusions of your perverted understandings must entirely cease to mingle with and mar the felicity of our present times; I mean the impious and wretched doublemindedness of heretics and schismatics. . . . . And in order that this remedy may be applied with effectual power, we have commanded that you be positively deprived of every gathering-point for your superstitious meetings, I mean all the houses of prayer (if such be worthy of the name) which belong to heretics, and that these be made over without delay to the catholic church; that any other places be confiscated to the public service, and no facility whatever be left for any future gathering."*

The sufferings that resulted from these cruel statutes must have been manifold. But the sighs and groans of the victims were stifled by the hand of power, and have not reached our times in any articulate manner. The testimony of Eusebius, who approved of Constantine's severity, is sufficient to show that the very letter and spirit of the command issued by the head of the catholic church was observed. The conventicles of that day were either closed or transferred by an impious act of injustice to the dominant church, and the worshippers scattered. "The members of the entire body became united and compacted in one harmonious whole; and the one catholic church, at unity with itself, shone with full lustre, while no heretical or schismatical body anywhere continued to exist. And the credit of having achieved this mighty work our heaven-protected emperor alone was able to attribute to himself."† While Constantine was thus evincing his own intolerance at home, he sought to procure some relief for persecuted Christians abroad. In the year 333, he wrote a letter to Sapor, the king of Persia, commending them to his protection, and not without success. Such was the kind of consistency he observed in relation to matters of conscience and religion.

* Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book iii. chaps. 64, 65.

† Ibid. book iii. chap. 66.

In July, 335, Constantine celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his accession to the throne, in the midst of great pomp and splendour, at Constantinople. A little time before he had dedicated the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and shortly after, the marriage ceremony of his second son Constantius was observed with great rejoicings. On all these occasions, Constantine lavished his gifts with great munificence, and was surrounded and followed by an immense number of bishops. During the same year he received presents of a costly kind from the Indians, and appointed his sons to act as Cæsars in the three provinces of the empire—Constantine the younger in the west, Constantius in the east, and Constans in Italy, the European east, and Africa. He thus seemed to be making provision for his own decease, which was not far distant. In the following year, he meditated and actually commenced an expedition against the Persians; but was reconciled by overtures of peace, and entered on friendly relations with that people. His last public act was the erection and consecration of a church in honour of the apostles at Constantinople, in which marble, gold, and Corinthian brass, indicated the state of wealth and luxury to which the catholic church had attained through his bounty. The act, however, was not wholly disinterested; for, as Eusebius informs us, he had made choice of this spot in the prospect of his own death, "anticipating, with extraordinary fervour of faith, that his body would share their title with the apostles themselves, and that he should thus even after death become the subject with them of the devotions which should be performed to their honour in this place. He accordingly caused twelve coffins to be set up in this church, like sacred pillars, in honour and memory of the apostolic number, in the centre of which his own was placed, having six of theirs on either side of it."*

We are not surprised after this to hear of the Asiatic pomp and effeminacy that characterised him in his last years—his false hair of varied colours—his sparkling diadem, collars, and bracelets, profusely adorned with gems

* Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book iv. chap. 60.

and pearls—and his embroidered and variegated robe of silk and gold.* The vanity—little short of blasphemy—that suggested a central place for his body between the tombs of the holy apostles, must have been overweening enough for any absurdity.

Shortly after this, during the festival of Easter, Constantine was seized with sickness, and anticipating a fatal termination of it, he requested to be baptized. He made an appeal to the bishops assembled at Nicomedia, earnestly desiring them to bestow upon him "the blessing of that seal which confers immortality." At the conclusion of the ceremony, "he arrayed himself in imperial vestments, white and brilliant as the light, and reclined on a couch of the purest white, refusing to clothe himself with the purple any more. He then lifted his voice and poured forth a strain of thanksgiving to God; after which he added these words: 'Now I know that I am truly blessed; now I feel assured that I am accounted worthy of immortality, and am made a partaker of divine light.'"†

The bishop who performed the ceremony was Eusebius, of Nicomedia, the very bishop whom he had deprived and banished for his heretical opinions some years before; and the ceremony itself must have suggested some unwelcome reflections in the minds of those heads of the church who were present. The holy catholic church, which stickled so much for rites and ceremonies, that were her very life and soul, had tamely submitted for more than twenty years to the authority and decisions of a monarch who, according to their own theory, had not belonged to their body until now. It would be futile to attempt any explanation of a fact, which, however interpreted, remains a lasting stigma on the character of the monarch and of the church which paid him so much adulation and homage.

Soon after his baptism, or on the 22nd of May, 337, the great Constantine died at Aquyrion, in the suburbs of Nicomedia. The body was conveyed to Constantinople, and there interred in the place provided for it. For a long

* Gibbon, Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 18.

† Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book iv. chaps. 62, 63.

time, however, it lay in state, arrayed in purple, crowned with the diadem, and on a golden bed, in the imperial palace. Officers of state and of the army, the chiefs of the household and the bishops, approached the body at stated hours, and on bended knee offered their homage; so that, as Eusebius remarks, he continued to possess imperial power even after death. The funeral terminated by prayers offered up for the peace of his soul; and his vast empire, with all the varied interests depending on it, descended to his sons.

On reviewing the career of this remarkable man, it seems necessary to distinguish between the three strongly marked periods into which it is naturally divided: the first extending from his accession to the throne of the west as Cæsar, to the invasion of Italy; the second from this period to the defeat of Licinius at the battle of Chrysopolis, when he became sole and universal emperor; and the third from this event till the time of his death. Little can be ascertained respecting his character during his early youth, on which to pronounce a decided opinion; excepting that his quick natural talents, and the schooling he received under the obstacles thrown in his way by the jealousy of Diocletian and Galerius, fitted him to act the wary and energetic part that marked his subsequent life. During the first period of his reign, he reserved himself for future emergencies, and acted a prudential rather than a natural part; strengthening himself in his position by the institution of a thorough system of discipline amongst his legions, and courting the favour of his subjects. During the second period, we see more of his true character. He had now made up his mind to absolute dominion, and pursued his aims with great circumspection and patience. On the whole, he was a gainer by putting himself at the head of a body like the catholic church, whose deficiency in numbers was more than compensated by their gratitude and zeal on his behalf, their superior moral power in the state, and by the sympathetic and formal unity they preserved throughout the whole empire, whatever the variations of place or dynasty. During the last period he revealed his true character,

because all, or nearly all, his aims were realized. The world and the church were both at his feet. His ambition was satisfied, and gave place to an inordinate vanity, which nothing could suppress, broken in upon now and then, when the fit of jealousy was on him, by gusts of passion that swept away all the ties of natural feeling, and contrasted greatly with the moderation and temper of his earlier years.

Of his general administration it is not easy to speak with brevity. Some of his laws were beneficial, and others manifestly injurious; while the oppressive taxation rendered necessary by his expensive plans, in the building of Constantinople, the government of the provinces, the maintenance of the army, and the aggrandizement of the church, tended greatly to the impoverishment and misery of the people at large.

The changes effected in the form of government were very considerable; but consisted mainly in an extension of the complicated Asiatic system introduced by Diocletian. The principal magistrates were divided into three classes; the Illustrious, the Respectable, and the Honourable. The first embraced the consuls and patricians; the prætorian prefects, including the prefects of Rome and Constantinople; the masters-general of the cavalry and infantry; and the seven ministers of the palace who attended upon the emperor. The third embraced the senators and magistrates generally; and the second, such as obtained distinction amongst them. The consuls, formerly elected by the people, now derived their title, for it was little more, from the appointment of the emperor; it was, however, the highest next to that of the emperor, and was still considered the noblest reward of loyalty. The patricians were next in rank to the consuls, had familiar access to the emperor, and pre-eminence over the remaining officers of state; but derived their dignity in the same manner as the consuls, and no longer from an hereditary title. The four pretorian prefects, whose ambition had formerly been formidable, on account of the military power entrusted to them, now became civil magistrates merely. Their jurisdiction cor-

responded with the four great divisions of the Roman empire—the Asiatic east, and Egypt; the European east, including Illyricum, Pannonia, Macedonia, and Greece; central Europe, including Italy and Rhœtia, the islands of the Mediterranean and north Africa; and western Europe, including Spain, Gaul, Britain, and Tingitania, or west Africa. Under these were thirteen vice-prefects, or counts, who were civil governors of the thirteen dioceses into which the empire was divided. Rome and Constantinople were excepted from the jurisdiction of the prætorian prefects, having prefects of their own. All these officers were appointed by the emperor, and removeable at his pleasure. An immense number of subordinate officers, of various orders and degrees, were also created from time to time, and the empire itself at length distributed into a hundred and sixteen provinces, with an expensive civil establishment over each. The effect of such minute subdivisions, and of the expensive system of government introduced in connexion with them, was seriously detrimental to the prosperity of the people.

A similar subdivision of officers was effected in the military administration of the empire, which was now entirely separated from the civil. The supreme military command, under the emperor, was conferred on the masters-general, who were at first two in number, but afterwards eight. Under these were the counts and dukes, with a large number of inferior officers. The total army was greatly increased, especially by barbarian auxiliaries, and large sums of money were required for its sustenance.

The seven high functionaries of the palace were the chamberlain, or prefect of the bed-chamber; the master of the offices, or home secretary; the quæstor, or lord chancellor; the count of the sacred largesses, or treasurer; the count of the private estate, or private treasurer; and two counts of the domestics, or commanders of the imperial life-guard. Besides these, two or three hundred agents, who combined the offices of messengers and spies, were employed in reporting the edicts and orders of the emperor

to the provinces, and in transmitting news from the provinces to him.*

Such was the hierarchy of the state, as brought to perfection by Constantine and his successors. A similar subordination was observable in ecclesiastical matters. A strict theory respecting the limits of the ecclesiastical and civil power was not laid down; neither would it have been possible to adhere to it, had that been effected. The catholic hierarchy was nicely adapted to accomplish, in general, all the purposes of the emperor, who, at the same time, took care that it should never exercise an independent jurisdiction detrimental to his objects. Although he represented himself as "a bishop ordained by God to overlook whatever is *external* to the church,"† he never permitted any *internal* arrangements that were inconsistent with his imperial supremacy; and his interference in the affairs of North Africa and at the council of Nice sufficiently proves that he regarded himself, and was regarded by the church, as its real, if not nominal head. Although the clergy endeavoured to make themselves as independent as possible of the other authorities of the state, they acknowledged the emperor as their highest judge. They had not yet arrogated to themselves an independent jurisdiction, by virtue of divine right and apostolic constitution. Even after the death of Constantine we find a bishop of Rome regarding it as a distinction to be judged only by the emperor.‡ The officers of the civil administration were appointed by Constantine during their good behaviour; although the same rule was not followed in relation to ecclesiastical officers, an approximation was made towards it, by depositions in some cases, and a skilful management in filling up vacancies in others; so that the bishops and clergy generally were submissive to his authority, and ready to yield to his plans.

Respecting the sincerity of his christian profession it is impossible to speak with anything like satisfaction, not-

* Gibbon, Hist. of the Decline and Fall, &c., chap. 17.

† Eusebius, Life of Constantine, book iv. chap. 24.

‡ Epistola Rom. Concilii ad Gratianum et Valentinianum Impp. A.D. 378, cited in Gieseler's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 422.

withstanding all that has been written in his favour. In whatever light the subject is examined, the verdict of the unbiassed mind, the honest conscience, goes against him. The judgment of posterity will confirm the opinion expressed by Niebuhr in the following words:—"The religion which he had in his head must have been a strange compound indeed. The man who had on his coins the inscription *Sol invictus*, who worshipped pagan divinities, consulted the haruspices, indulged in a number of pagan superstitions, shut up pagan temples, and interfered with the council of Nicæa, must have been a repulsive phenomenon, and was certainly not a Christian. He did not allow himself to be baptized till the last moments of his life, and those who praise him for this do not know what they are doing. He was a superstitious man, and mixed up his christian religion with all kinds of absurd superstitions and opinions. When, therefore, certain oriental writers call him ἰσαποστολος (equal to the apostles), they do not know what they are saying; and to speak of him as a saint is a profanation of the word."*

But whatever the opinion respecting his sincerity, there can be no question as to the courage and ability with which he came forward to espouse the catholic party. He was just the man, and the only man, with sufficient daring in his composition to commence the gigantic work of first discountenancing and then of disestablishing paganism; he was at the same time just the man to perceive in catholicism that happy admixture of religious and political susceptibilities which rendered it the fitting instrument of his purposes; neither was he long in ascertaining that by a little skilful management the whole body might be attached to his person, and be rendered subservient to his will. That he established Christianity, none who know what Christianity is will admit for a single moment; that he established the catholic church, and gave consolidation, influence, and vast augmentation to the corruptions that by worldly influences and imperceptibly slow degrees had grown out of an originally pure and perfect system, cannot

* Lectures on the Hist. of Rome, lect. lxxix.

be denied. This is not the place for speculating on the probable course which Christianity would have taken, had Constantine never attempted to patronize and establish its professors; it is enough to know that the example which he set to princes of interfering between the consciences of subjects and their God, was followed by a long train of evils which have proved a greater hindrance to the propagation of genuine Christianity than all the persecutions ever inflicted on its adherents, and which it may take many ages even yet entirely to remove.

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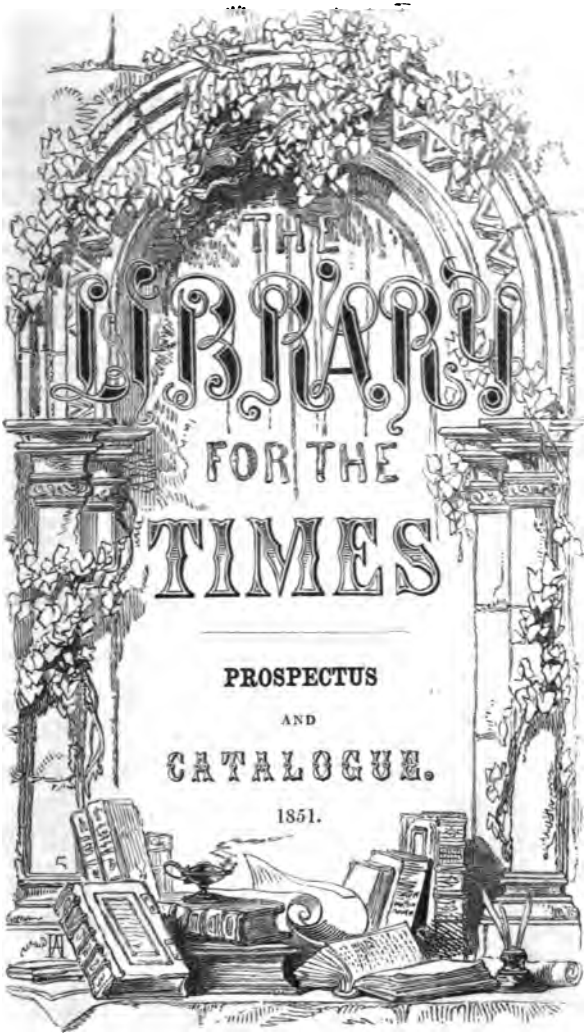

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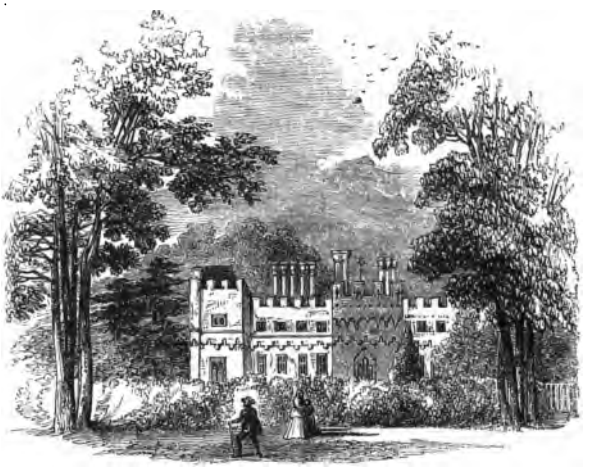

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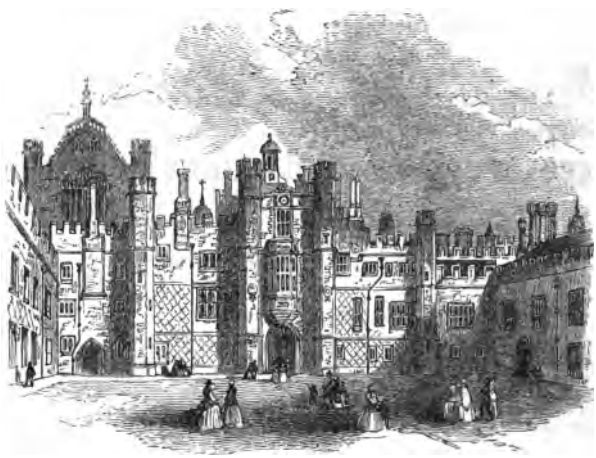

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